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**“KEEP ON READING THIS CRAZY STORY”: ABOUT IMPOLITENESS AND
FANFICTION IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

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FANFICTION IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

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**KEEP ON READING THIS CRAZY STORY”: ABOUT IMPOLITENESS AND FANFICTION
IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

ADRIANA MICHELETTI CARVALHO

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“In our deepest moments, we say the most inadequate things.”
(O'BRIEN, 1986)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates fan interactions within the Darvey fandom by exploring (im)politeness in fanfictions posted on the Fanfiction.net platform. The primary aim is to understand (im)polite communication practices in this community following the conclusion of the "SUITS-USA" series in September 2019. Using qualitative analysis, the study examines comments from December 2019 to 2021, identifying instances of (im)politeness focusing on language, tone, and context. As an active member of the Darvey fan community, the insider perspective allows for an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural dynamics specific to the Darvey fanbase. The theoretical framework includes contributions from Goffman, Grice, Lakoff, Leech, Brown and Levinson, and Culpeper's approach to impoliteness. The results reveal that impoliteness significantly impacts community bonding, as impolite communication helps build positive relationships, manage conflicts, express approval and disapproval, negotiate social identities, and create a sense of belonging. These dynamics significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of interactions, offering insights into fan discourse and its role in online social interaction.

Keywords: (im)politeness; fanfiction; online communities.

RESUMO

Este estudo investiga as interações dos fãs dentro do fandom Darvey explorando a (im)polidez nas fanfictions postadas na plataforma Fanfiction.net. O objetivo principal é compreender as práticas de comunicação (im)polidas nesta comunidade após a conclusão da série "SUITS-USA" em setembro de 2019. Utilizando análise qualitativa, o estudo examina comentários de dezembro de 2019 a 2021, identificando instâncias de (im)polidez com foco na linguagem, tom e contexto. Como um membro ativo da comunidade de fãs Darvey, a perspectiva interna permite uma compreensão profunda das dinâmicas sociais e culturais específicas da base de fãs Darvey. O referencial teórico inclui contribuições de Goffman, Grice, Lakoff, Leech, Brown e Levinson, além da abordagem de Culpeper sobre impolidez. Os resultados revelam que a impolidez impacta significativamente os laços da comunidade, pois a comunicação impolida ajuda a construir relacionamentos positivos, gerenciar conflitos, expressar aprovação e desaprovação, negociar identidades sociais e criar um senso de pertencimento. Essas dinâmicas melhoram significativamente a eficácia geral das interações, oferecendo insights sobre o discurso dos fãs e seu papel na interação social online.

Palavras-chave: (im)polidez; fanfiction; comunidades online.

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Abbreviation List

AO3 - Archive of Our Own

COVID-19 - Coronavirus Disease 2019

FANFIC - Fanfiction

FFNET - Fanfiction.net

GepTed - Study Group on Education Technologies

PP - Politeness Principle

POV - Point of View

TV - Television

USA - United States of America

UFMG - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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INTRODUCTION

In the vast and dynamic world of digital communication, fanfiction communities have emerged as vibrant spaces where fans deeply engage with their favorite media, creating and sharing their own narratives. These communities offer a platform for fans to explore, reinterpret, and expand the worlds of their favorite characters and stories. According to the Organization for Transformative Works, fanfiction is a significant phenomenon, with Archive of Our Own (AO3) alone hosting over 13 million works as of 2024¹. This highlights the sheer volume and active participation in these communities, underscoring their importance in digital culture.

Fanfiction, as a form of creative expression, allows fans to reimagine and reinterpret existing works, fostering a collaborative and transformative culture within fandoms – communities of fans who share a common interest in specific subjects like TV shows, book series, or movies. The Darvey fandom, characterized by its rich engagement and emotional investment in the characters, serves as an ideal case study for examining (im)politeness. Following the series' conclusion in September 2019, fans continued to explore and expand the story through fanfiction, predominantly on the platform Fanfiction.net. As one of the largest fanfiction archives on the internet, with over 12 million stories spanning various genres and fandoms, Fanfiction.net provides a rich corpus for analysis. This platform offers insights into how fans negotiate their social identities, express approval or disapproval, deliver criticism, and maintain community cohesion through their comments on fanfictions.

By employing qualitative analysis, this research scrutinizes the comments on fanfictions to uncover patterns of (im)politeness. The analysis of comments on Fanfiction.net focuses on identifying expressions of (im)politeness and understanding how these expressions reflect the social dynamics within the Darvey fandom. Integral to these dynamics are the expressions of disapproval and criticism, which are fundamental aspects of communication within this community. Goffman's (1967) concept of face and face-work provides a basis for understanding how fans manage their social identities during interactions. When fans express disapproval or criticism, they perform face-threatening acts that challenge the positive social value individuals' claim for themselves.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), these face-threatening acts require specific

¹ According to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archive_of_Our_Own, accessed on october 4th, 2024.

politeness strategies to mitigate their impact and maintain social harmony. Grice's (1975) cooperative principle further explains how conversational maxims are adhered to or violated, revealing the underlying social dynamics of these interactions. Lakoff (1975) and Leech (1983) contribute to this understanding by highlighting positive and negative politeness strategies that either establish rapport or avoid imposition. Culpeper (2011) extends these theories to impoliteness, examining how deliberate face-threatening acts, such as direct insults, sarcasm, and mock politeness, are performed and interpreted to assert power and negotiate social identities.

Taking the above into consideration, the primary objective of this research is to shed light on how (im)politeness is enacted within the Darvey fandom. By analyzing the comments posted on fanfictions from December 2019 to 2021, this study seeks to identify how (im)polite expressions manifest and their impact on the community. In addition to analyzing direct impoliteness between individuals, this research will also explore instances of impoliteness directed at third parties. By investigating how fans express disapproval or criticism of characters, writers, or other community members not directly involved in the conversation, we gain insight into how impoliteness toward third parties contributes to the dynamics of community bonding, conflict management, and social identity negotiation. This aspect of impoliteness can be particularly significant, as it often plays a role in reinforcing group boundaries, creating alliances, or sparking community-wide debates.

By examining the ways in which fans express approval, disapproval, and negotiate their social identities, this research provides insights into the broader implications of (im)politeness in online fan communities. It enriches our comprehension of digital discourse and its impact on social interaction, offering valuable perspectives on how fan communities function and maintain cohesion in the digital age. We depart from the notion that verbal attacks, insults, and swearwords can be considered a feature of fandom communities when they assess narratives and characters that are seen as vile, oppressive or unjust.

In this study, the phenomenon is investigated through the lenses of models of linguistic (im)politeness. The reason is that, even though there can be an array of different terminologies ("uncivil language", "verbal offense", and "verbal aggression", among others), impoliteness is a technical term used to refer to situations in which offense is mostly achieved through verbal behaviors. It is also the least used in colloquial English and has been employed as a superordinate term that encompasses all the others (CULPERER, 2011; CULPERER, TANTUCCI 2021; OLIVEIRA, DRINÓCZI, MIRANDA, 2022). To analyze the data, we have also relied on the theoretical framework related to swearing (DYNEL, 2023), where

(im)politeness is also seen as a resource to create in-group solidarity (BLITVICH, 2022).

The research employs qualitative analysis to scrutinize fanfiction comments on Fanfiction.net, aiming to uncover patterns of (im)politeness. By examining these comments, the study identifies expressions of (im)politeness and how they reflect the social dynamics within the Darvey fandom. Central to these dynamics are expressions of disapproval and criticism, which are crucial aspects of communication within the Darvey fan community. These expressions play a key role in how fans interact, negotiate social identities, and maintain community cohesion.

By analyzing fanfiction comments on Fanfiction.net, this study seeks to identify expressions of disapproval or criticism and understand how these comments enact impoliteness within the Darvey fandom. The research also aims to uncover how these impoliteness formulae influence membership and participation, offering insights into the broader implications of (im)politeness in online fan communities. To do so, the following set of research questions, hypotheses and objectives were established.

Research questions:

1. What are the expressions of disapproval or criticism found in the posts of Fanfiction.net website?
2. How do commentaries containing disapproval or criticism enact impoliteness in this context?
3. How does the enactment of impoliteness influence membership and participation in a fanfiction community?

Taking into consideration the communicative interactions within the Darvey fandom on the Fanfiction.net platform, this work hypothesizes that the enactment of (im)politeness through expressions of disapproval and criticism is a significant component of fanfiction comments. It also proposes that, in fanfiction communities, such impoliteness will potentially enhance a sense of connection and engagement among members.

OBJECTIVES

This research aims to explore the dynamics of (im)politeness within the Darvey fan community on Fanfiction.net. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. Identify expressions of disapproval and criticism:

To analyze comments on Fanfiction.net in order to uncover the various ways in which

fans express disapproval and criticism. This involves examining the language, tone, and context of these expressions to understand how they reflect the social dynamics within the Darvey fandom.

2. Investigate the enactment of impoliteness:

To explore how comments containing expressions of possible disapproval or criticism enact impoliteness within the fan community. This objective focuses on identifying the formulae and conventionalized forms of impoliteness used by fans, as outlined by Culpeper (2011) and others, and how these expressions impact interactions and relationships within the fandom.

3. Assess the influence on membership and participation:

To discuss how the enactment of impoliteness influences membership and participation in the fanfiction community. This involves understanding the role of impoliteness in community bonding, conflict management, and the negotiation of social identities, and how these dynamics contribute to or hinder community cohesion and engagement.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of (im)politeness practices in the Darvey fandom and their broader implications for digital communication and social interaction within online fan communities.

This study is thoroughly structured to explore the proposed hypothesis by a detailed examination of fan interactions in the Darvey fandom. This section sets the stage for the entire research, explaining why the topic is significant as it outlines the key questions and aims that drive the analysis.

Next, the theoretical framework section delves into the contributions of various scholars, including Goffman, Grice, Lakoff, Leech, Brown and Levinson, and Culpeper. This section is crucial as it provides the academic backbone for the study, discussing how theories of (im)politeness and social interactions are applied to understand the dynamics of communication in the digital fanfiction environment. By integrating these theories, the study builds a robust framework that supports the subsequent analysis of fan comments, allowing for a deeper insight into how language and social norms interplay in online communities.

The virtual communities and fanfiction section expands on the theoretical discussion by focusing specifically on the concepts of fanfiction and virtual communities. It emphasizes how these platforms enable creative expression and the formation of social bonds among fans, providing a historical and contextual backdrop to the practice of fanfiction. This section also highlights the evolution of fanfiction and the challenges it entails, situating the Darvey

fandom within a broader cultural and technological context. By doing so, it illustrates the unique characteristics of fanfiction communities and their significance in the digital age.

Following this, the methodology section outlines the procedures used for selecting and collecting the corpus of comments, along with the qualitative analytical approach adopted for this study. This section explains the rationale behind choosing Fanfiction.net as the platform for analysis and details the criteria for selecting the comments that were examined. The methodology is meticulously described to ensure the research's transparency and replicability, providing a clear account of how the data was gathered and analyzed. This section is essential for establishing the credibility and rigor of the study, showing that the research process is both systematic and thorough.

The heart of this work lies in the section named “The analysis of comments”. It presents the qualitative analysis of the comments, identifying instances of (im)politeness and discussing how these manifestations affect community interactions and cohesion. Specific examples of comments are analyzed to illustrate the dynamics of (im)politeness within the Darvey fandom. This detailed examination uncovers patterns and themes in the data, revealing how fans use language to build relationships, express identities, and navigate conflicts. The analysis provides concrete evidence to support the hypothesis and offers a rich understanding of the social interactions within the fandom.

The results and discussion in this section synthesizes the findings of the analysis in light of the theoretical framework. It offers insights into (im)politeness practices and their role in fostering community bonds, exploring the broader implications of these findings for understanding fan discourse and online social interactions. This section also discusses the significance of the results, linking them back to the research questions and theoretical concepts introduced earlier. It also considers the implications for future research, suggesting new avenues for exploring the dynamics of online communities and fan interactions.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings, their contributions to the field of communication and (im)politeness studies, also providing suggestions for future research. It reflects on the limitations of the study and potential directions for further investigation into the topic. This closing section ties together the entire work, highlighting the study's contributions and emphasizing its relevance to both academic and practical contexts. The structure of this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of communicative practices within the Darvey fandom, contributing to a deeper understanding of social dynamics in digital fan communities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Virtual Communities and Fanfiction

Fanfiction is a form of creative expression where fans reimagine and reinterpret existing works and has long been a cornerstone of fan culture. Emerging from the collaborative spirit of science fiction fandom in the mid-20th century, fanfiction has evolved into a vibrant and diverse medium that spans genres, platforms, and fandoms. However, the practice of fanfiction has its complexities and controversies.

This section explores two key themes surrounding fanfiction: the exploration of alternative storylines and character development, and the misrepresentation of original creators' intentions. Through an analysis of scholarly works by Jenkins (2012), Coppa (2017), and others, as well as an examination of the perception of fandoms and fanfiction within broader society, this section seeks to provide insight into the multifaceted nature of fanfiction and its impact on fan communities and popular culture. By delving into these themes, we can gain a deeper understanding of the creative and social dimensions of fanfiction and its role within contemporary media landscapes.

Virtual communities and fanfiction are a growing phenomenon in the digital age, offering a platform for individuals to connect, create, and share their work with a global audience. The popularity of fanfiction and virtual communities has been credited to their ability to provide a safe and open space for creative exploration and expression. As technology advances, virtual communities and fanfiction continue to evolve and expand, creating a unique platform for users to engage in meaningful and creative discourse.

The theory about virtual communities and fanfiction has been heavily influenced by the works of scholars such as Boyd (2014), who has argued that in order to understand the complexities of virtual communities, one must look beyond the surface level to explore the underlying dynamics of power, identity, and community. According to Boyd (2014), the emergence of virtual communities and fanfiction is a result of the digital age, which has allowed for the formation of new and unique forms of social interaction and communication. Additionally, Boyd (2014) argues that virtual communities and fanfiction are a result of the need for individuals to express themselves in a safe and inclusive environment, as well as the desire to connect with like-minded individuals.

The works of Jenkins (2006) have also been instrumental in our understanding of virtual communities and fanfiction. Jenkins (2006) argues that fanfiction and virtual communities are a powerful tool for self-expression and creativity, as they provide a space for individuals to share their own stories and interpretations of popular media. Additionally, Jenkins (2006) emphasizes the importance of the community aspect of fanfiction and virtual communities, arguing that these spaces are valuable for fostering meaningful connections and relationships between users. Overall, virtual communities and fanfiction are complex and multifaceted, comprising a variety of concepts from technology, sociology, and media studies. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the theoretical framework of virtual communities and fanfiction, providing a unique and ever-evolving platform for creative exploration and expression.

Community is a term often used to describe a group of people who share common interests, values, and goals. According to Debray (2017) “Community, in its most basic sense, is a group of individuals who share common experiences and support each other through those experiences.” Community is more than just a group of people; it is a feeling of connectedness and belonging. It is the sense of being part of something greater than oneself. In a community, individuals come together to share their stories, resources, and ideas. A community is a place where people can feel heard, understood, and accepted, regardless of their differences. The phenomenon also encompasses a number of intersecting concepts, including the idea of “fan culture” and the concept of “transmediated communication”. Agreeing with Henry Jenkins (2006), fan culture is “a complex network of communication and exchange in which fans interact with each other, with media producers, and with the texts that they collectively create.” Through this network, fans engage in a variety of activities, including writing and sharing fanfiction, creating fan art, and engaging in online discussion forums.

At the same time, the concept of “transmediated communication” has been proposed by media scholar Robert Burnett to explain the way in which fan culture is shaped by the technologies of communication. According to Burnett (2000), transmediated communication involves the “interaction between human subjects and mediated texts, in which the participants use multiple media to interact and exchange messages.” In other words, fan culture is not only shaped by the technologies of communication, but also by the way in which fans use these technologies to interact with one another.

In a similar vein, Jenkins (2006) and Burnett (2000) suggest that fan culture is an inherently transmediated phenomenon. Fans use a variety of media, such as text-based

discussion forums, online video-sharing sites, and social media platforms to engage in conversations about their favorite texts, share fanfiction, and create fan art. These activities, in turn, shape the way in which fan culture is experienced and understood by its participants. As Jenkins (2006) notes, “the very structure of fan culture is created by the way fans use different media to interact with each other and with the texts they are creating.” In this sense, virtual communities and fanfiction suggest that fan culture is an inherently transmediated phenomenon, shaped by the way in which fans use different media to interact with one another and with the texts they are creating.

It can take many forms, including prose, poetry, scripts, and even multimedia productions like videos or podcasts. While fanfiction has existed for centuries in various forms, its modern iteration began to emerge in the mid-20th century with the rise of science fiction fandom. One of the earliest known examples of fanfiction is “The Enchanted Duplicator,” a novella written by Walt Willis and Bob Shaw in 1954. It satirized the culture of science fiction fandom and featured thinly veiled caricatures of real fans and writers. This work, while not directly using characters from existing works of fiction, laid the groundwork for the collaborative and transformative nature of fanfiction.

The term “fanfiction” itself began to gain popularity in the 1960s and 1970s within science fiction fandom (JENKINS, 2012). Fanzines, amateur publications created by fans for fans, often included stories written by fans based on their favorite science fiction universes. These stories ranged from straightforward adventures to elaborate reinterpretations of existing characters and settings. As the internet became more accessible in the 1990s, fanfiction saw a significant surge in popularity and accessibility (COPPA, 2017). Online platforms such as FanFiction.net, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and various fandom-specific websites provided spaces for fans to share their work with a global audience. The rise of social media platforms further facilitated the sharing and discussion of fan-created content.

Despite its popularity, fanfiction has often existed in a legal gray area (JENKINS et al., 2009). While many creators and rights holders tolerate or even encourage fan works as a form of fan engagement, others have taken legal action to protect their intellectual property rights. This has led to ongoing debates about the legality and ethics of fanfiction, as well as discussions about the transformative nature of creativity and the relationship between creators and their audiences.

While fanfiction has its roots in science fiction fandom, it has since expanded to encompass a wide range of genres and fandoms, including literature, television, film, anime, video games, and more. Today, fanfiction continues to thrive as a vibrant and diverse form of

creative expression, with millions of stories written and shared by fans around the world.

Fostering community and connection among fans is a central aspect of fan culture, facilitated by various platforms and activities (JENKINS, 2012). Fan communities provide spaces for like-minded individuals to share their enthusiasm for a particular work or genre, forming bonds over shared interests and experiences. One way fan communities cultivate connection is through conventions and fan gatherings (JENKINS, 2012). These events offer fans the opportunity to meet in person, participate in discussions, attend panels, workshops and engage in activities related to their favorite works. Conventions provide a sense of belonging and camaraderie as fans come together to celebrate their shared passions.

In addition to offline gatherings, online platforms play a crucial role in fostering community among fans (JENKINS et al., 2009). Websites like forums, social media groups, and dedicated fan sites serve as virtual meeting places where fans can discuss their favorite works, share fan creations, and connect with others who share their interests. These platforms enable fans from around the world to come together and form friendships and collaborative relationships.

Fanfiction archives, such as FanFiction.net and Archive of Our Own (AO3), also contribute to community building among fans (COPPA, 2017). These platforms provide spaces for fans to share their creative works, receive feedback from fellow fans, and engage in discussions about their favorite characters, storylines, and themes. By participating in fanfiction communities, fans can develop relationships with other writers and readers who appreciate their work and share their passion for storytelling. This interconnectedness fosters a strong sense of community and collaboration, enriching the fan experience and contributing to the ongoing vitality of fan culture.

Moreover, fan communities often engage in collective activities such as fan conventions, fan clubs, and fan-run events (JENKINS, 2012). These activities not only provide opportunities for fans to come together and bond over their shared interests but also allow them to collaborate on projects, organize fan-driven initiatives, and support causes related to their fandom. By engaging in these collective endeavors, fans can deepen their connections with one another and build a stronger sense of community. These events often serve as the backbone of fan culture, providing physical spaces for fans to celebrate their shared passions, exchange ideas, and create lasting memories.

Overall, fostering community and connection among fans is essential for creating a sense of belonging and shared identity within fan culture (JENKINS et al., 2009). Whether through in-person gatherings, online platforms, or collaborative projects, fan communities

play a vital role in nurturing relationships, facilitating creative expression, and celebrating the love of fandom. The sense of belonging that these communities foster is crucial for fans, as it provides them with a support network and a space to freely express their creativity and enthusiasm for their favorite works. This interconnectedness is what keeps fan culture vibrant and ever-evolving, allowing it to adapt and grow with its members.

Exploration of alternative storylines and character development is another fundamental aspect of fanfiction, offering fans the opportunity to reimagine and reinterpret their favorite works (JENKINS, 2012). Fanfiction writers often explore “what if” scenarios, diverging from the canon of the original work to explore new possibilities and perspectives. This creative freedom allows fans to take established characters and narratives in entirely new directions, crafting stories that reflect their own interpretations and desires. Through this process, fanfiction becomes a space for innovation and personal expression, where writers can experiment with different narrative structures, themes and character arcs.

One common practice in fanfiction is “fix-it” fic, where fans rewrite aspects of the original story they found unsatisfactory or disappointing (JENKINS, 2012). This can involve altering character fates, resolving unresolved plotlines, or providing characters with different outcomes or motivations. By doing so, fans can create narratives that align more closely with their preferences and interpretations of the source material. Additionally, fanfiction allows writers to delve into the nuances of character development, providing deeper insights into characters’ thoughts, feelings, and motivations (JENKINS, 2012).

Writers may explore characters’ backstories, relationships, and inner conflicts, offering readers a richer understanding of their favorite characters beyond what is presented in the original work. This in-depth exploration not only enhances the readers' engagement with the story but also adds layers of complexity to the characters, making them more relatable and multidimensional. Furthermore, fanfiction provides a platform for fans to explore alternative pairings and relationships that may not be present or explored in the original work (COPPA, 2017). This can include same-sex pairings, unconventional relationships, or romantic pairings between characters who are not romantically involved in the canon.

By doing so, fans can explore diverse representations of love and relationships that resonate with their own experiences and desires. This exploration of non-canonical relationships allows fans to address gaps in representation and create stories that reflect a wider range of human experiences and emotions. Through the exploration of alternative storylines and character development, fanfiction allows fans to engage in creative expression and storytelling, contributing to the richness and diversity of fan culture (COPPA, 2017). By

offering new perspectives and interpretations of beloved characters and narratives, fanfiction enriches the fan experience and fosters a sense of creativity and community within fandoms.

The collaborative nature of fanfiction communities, where writers and readers interact, provide feedback, and support one another, further strengthens these bonds and encourages ongoing participation and creativity. However, the misrepresentation of original creators' intentions is a complex issue within fanfiction communities, as fans reinterpret and remix existing works to create new narratives and characters (JENKINS, 2012). While some fans may adhere closely to the original creator's vision, others may take liberties with the source material, introducing elements that diverge from the creator's intentions or go against established canon.

This can lead to tensions between fans and the original creators, raising questions about authorship, creative control, and the boundaries of fan expression. While some creators embrace fanfiction as a testament to the impact of their work, others may feel that it undermines or distorts their original vision. This ongoing debate highlights the complex and often-contentious relationship between fan communities and the creators of the original works they love. Fanfiction writers often navigate a delicate balance between respecting the original creator's work and exercising their own creative license (JENKINS, 2012). While some creators may embrace fanfiction as a form of fan engagement and see it as a natural extension of their storytelling universe, others may view fan works as a distortion or misrepresentation of their original vision.

This dynamic creates a nuanced landscape where fanfiction writers must constantly negotiate their creative impulses with the potential reactions of the original creators and the broader fan community. The creative freedom inherent in fanfiction allows writers to explore and expand upon the original narratives, adding their personal touch and interpretation, yet it also comes with the responsibility of maintaining a certain level of respect for the source material.

The perception of fandoms and fanfiction within broader society also influences how fan works are perceived and received (JENKINS et al., 2009). While some view fanfiction as a form of creative expression and a testament to the dedication and passion of fans, others may dismiss it as derivative or inferior to the original work. This divide in perception can contribute to tensions between fans and creators, as well as within fan communities themselves. The differing views on fanfiction highlight the ongoing debate about the value and legitimacy of fan-created content, with some praising its creativity and others questioning its originality.

These societal perceptions can impact the reception of fan works by affecting how fanfiction is discussed and appreciated both within and outside fan communities. Moreover, the rise of social media and online platforms has amplified the visibility of fanfiction and fan communities, leading to increased scrutiny and debate over the legitimacy and ethics of fan works (JENKINS et al., 2009). While some fans may embrace the opportunity to engage with creators and fellow fans on platforms like Twitter/X, Tumblr, or Discord, others may feel pressure to conform to certain expectations or standards within their fandom.

The accessibility of online platforms allows for a wider dissemination of fan works, which can lead to greater recognition and appreciation but also exposes fanfiction to critical scrutiny from a broader audience. This heightened visibility can be a double-edged sword, offering both opportunities for community building and challenges related to maintaining creative integrity and navigating fan expectations. Despite these challenges, fanfiction remains a vibrant and thriving form of creative expression within fan communities (COPPA, 2017). By exploring alternative storylines, character dynamics, and themes, fanfiction writers contribute to the ongoing dialogue and interpretation of beloved works, enriching the fan experience and fostering a sense of community and belonging.

The collaborative and participatory nature of fanfiction encourages fans to engage deeply with the source material and with each other, creating a dynamic and interactive fan culture. Fanfiction provides a space for fans to express their creativity, share their unique perspectives, and connect with others who share their interests, thereby strengthening the bonds within the fan community. In conclusion, the misrepresentation of original creators' intentions and the perception of fanfiction within fandoms are multifaceted issues shaped by factors such as fan creativity, fan-community dynamics, and broader societal attitudes towards fan works (COPPA, 2017). While tensions between fans and creators may arise over questions of canon and interpretation, fanfiction ultimately serves as a testament to the passion and dedication of fans who seek to engage with and contribute to their favorite works in meaningful ways.

The ongoing dialogue between fan creators and original creators, along with the evolving nature of fan communities, underscores the significance of fanfiction as a cultural phenomenon. It reflects the deep connections fans form with the stories and characters they love and highlights the creative potential that fanfiction unlocks in reimagining and expanding these narratives.

Having explored the complex dynamics of fanfiction communities and the creative tensions they navigate, the next theme of this study will delve into earlier studies on

(im)politeness. This exploration will provide a foundational understanding of how (im)politeness theories have evolved and how they apply to the interactions observed within fan communities. By examining the theoretical underpinnings of (im)politeness, we can better comprehend the communication formulae employed by fans and the impact of these expressions on community cohesion and interaction.

Studies on (im)politeness

In any social setting, unspoken rules govern interactions to ensure a smooth flow of communication. While these norms are not rigidly defined, individuals aiming for acceptance within a specific community must adhere to them. These norms encompass various aspects of behavior, from how to dress and greet others to the language choices used in communication, including digital environments. People typically behave in a manner consistent with the expectations they hold for their public image, known as their face. Social regulations vary across cultures, influencing efforts to maintain face, which we define as (im)politeness. The concept of face is central to understanding these social norms, as it represents the positive social value individuals claim for themselves during interactions.

Communication is deeply intertwined with social relationships, where politeness serves as a strategy for preserving face. Essentially, (im)politeness theories suggest that people's speech patterns are shaped by the communicative context, which in turn reflects the formation of socially bonded relationships forged through language. These theories provide insights into how individuals use language to manage their social identities and navigate the complexities of social interactions. The study of (im)politeness involves understanding these interactional norms and how they function across different contexts and cultures, highlighting the role of language in maintaining social harmony and addressing conflicts.

To delve into (im)politeness as an inherent aspect of human relationships, it is essential to explore its key themes and theoretical foundations. This section will review the sociological and pragmatic approaches to (im)politeness, starting with the foundational concepts of face and face-work. It will discuss the role of face in social interactions, drawing on the work of scholars who have contributed significantly to this field. The exploration includes the principles of politeness and impoliteness, examining how these principles are applied in communication to manage social harmony and conflict. Key themes such as positive and negative politeness formulae, the Cooperative Principle, and face-threatening acts will be analyzed to understand how they operate in everyday interactions.

Furthermore, the section will explore how these theories have evolved to address impoliteness, considering how intentional and unintentional impoliteness impact social relationships and communication dynamics. By focusing on these thematic areas, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of (im)politeness and their relevance to both offline and digital environments. This theoretical framework will provide the necessary background to analyze the communication practices within the Darvey fandom and other fan communities, highlighting how (im)politeness shapes interactions in these unique social settings. The examination of these themes will also shed light on the broader implications of (im)politeness in online discourse and digital communication, offering insights into how fans negotiate their social identities and maintain community cohesion through language.

The concept of face

In an era dominated by macrostructural sociological studies, Goffman introduced a micro-sociological approach, examining society at the level of direct interactions between individuals in settings like public places, medical institutions, and asylums. His focus on the minutiae of daily interactions provided a new lens through which the social mechanisms underlying individual actions may be understood. Employing various metaphors such as theatrical, rites, face, territories, and cinematic, Goffman meticulously analyzed the intricacies of interpersonal communication, offering insights into how people navigate social landscapes and maintain their identities in the presence of others.

Goffman's theatrical metaphor, as outlined in his 1971 work, delves into how individuals behave in front of others, the impressions they seek to convey, and the mechanisms employed to publicly adopt certain roles. The concept of representation, central to this metaphor, influenced the study of (im)politeness by highlighting the importance of the image presented in public interactions. The notion of face, a cornerstone in Goffman's work, refers to the positive social value individuals claim for themselves during interactions. It is a socially constructed image susceptible to the risks of interaction, with individuals experiencing emotional responses based on the validation of social values. Interlocutors must constantly balance their actions to avoid threatening each other's face, necessitating a set of practices termed face-work to "save faces" during contact. This dynamic interplay of presenting and protecting one's face underscores the delicate balance individuals must maintain to foster social harmony.

Goffman also introduced the concept of territory, representing the intangible scope in

which individuals operate. This notion goes beyond physical space, encompassing the precautions individuals take for themselves to navigate social interactions effectively. These concepts, intertwined in Goffman's analysis of interactions, shed light on the intricate dynamics of interpersonal communication and the strategies individuals employ to protect their identities and maintain social order. In addition to self-territory violations, Goffman (1971) suggests that people engage in routines, socialization practices, and standardizations during interpersonal contact to maintain normalcy in interaction order. This order relies on organization for existence and regulation, guiding interlocutors in organizing message sequences during conversations, initiating and concluding speech, and maintaining face-to-face dignity.

Moreover, Goffman (1971) refers to supportive and remedial interchanges as interpersonal rituals, which serve to reinforce social norms and mitigate the impact of offensive acts. Supportive interchanges involve expressions of "identity sympathy," such as inquiring about someone's well-being or family, marking interaction beginnings or endings, and offering approval. Remedial interchanges address offensive acts by softening their impact and preserving face personalization, thus keeping the social order intact.

Expanding on his insights into interactional exchanges, Goffman (1971) likens them to a competitive game where individuals aim to maintain a favorable self-image by sharing positive information about themselves and negative information about others. He emphasizes the importance of self-preservation and perceived superiority during interactions, highlighting the role of the audience in shaping these dynamics.

Introducing the concept of frames, Goffman (1971) suggests that our actions are framed by our cumulative experiences, shaping our understanding of the world. This framing process helps us interpret events as orderly and interconnected, distinguishing between 'primary frames' and 'transformed frames' that alter reality into a narrative form, reflecting the adaptability of our perception and experience. These theoretical constructs provided by Goffman illustrate the complex mechanisms at play in social interactions, emphasizing the continuous negotiation individuals undertake to present themselves favorably and manage the impressions others form of them.

In conclusion, Goffman's theories offer profound insights into the dynamics of social interaction, particularly regarding (im)politeness. His approach, often described as a 'sociology of occasions,' focuses on how human actions shape social events, highlighting the regulation of social harmony and the management of conflicts in interpersonal interactions. Goffman's meticulous analysis of face, territory, and interactional rituals provides a

foundational understanding of how individuals maintain social order and navigate the complexities of everyday interactions.

Having explored Goffman's influential contributions to the understanding of (im)politeness, the next theme of this work will delve into Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. This theory, developed in the 1970s and 1980s, offers a detailed framework for analyzing how politeness strategies are employed to manage face and facilitate social cooperation. By examining Brown and Levinson's work, we will further uncover the nuanced strategies individuals use to maintain social harmony and mitigate face-threatening acts in their interactions.

Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory

Brown and Levinson's Face Theory expands upon Grice's cooperative principle by examining how politeness strategies contribute to effective communication and social cooperation. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), politeness is a crucial aspect of communication as it involves the management of social relationships and the preservation of individuals' face or self-esteem during interactions. Their theory posits that in any social interaction, individuals are concerned with maintaining their own face while also respecting the face of their interlocutors. This dual focus on self-presentation and social harmony forms the basis of their politeness strategies.

In their seminal work, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose a framework that delineates various politeness strategies employed in communication. They identify two main types of politeness: positive politeness, which involves behaviors that seek to establish rapport and solidarity with the interlocutor, and negative politeness, which involves behaviors aimed at avoiding imposition or intrusion on the interlocutor's autonomy. These strategies serve to mitigate potential threats to face and promote social harmony. Positive politeness strategies might include compliments, expressions of interest, or affirmations that reinforce the social bond, while negative politeness strategies might involve indirect requests, apologies, or deference that minimize the imposition on the listener.

Moreover, Brown and Levinson introduce the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs), which are utterances that have the potential to challenge or threaten the positive or negative face of the interlocutor. Positive face refers to the desire for approval and affirmation from others, while the negative face pertains to the desire for autonomy and freedom from

imposition. Politeness strategies are employed to mitigate the threat posed by FTAs and maintain interpersonal relationships. For instance, an FTA could be a direct criticism, which threatens the positive face by implying the person is not valued, or a request, which threatens the negative face by imposing on the person's freedom of action.

For example, the strategy of bald on-record speech involves directly stating an FTA without any attempt to mitigate its impact. This strategy is typically used in situations where the social distance between interlocutors is minimal, and the imposition is perceived as low. However, in situations where the imposition is significant or the social distance is greater, individuals are more likely to employ politeness strategies such as hedging, using indirect speech acts, or employing redressive action to mitigate the potential threat to face and preserve social harmony. Hedging might involve phrases like "sort of" or "kind of" to lessen the impact, while indirect speech acts might include saying "Could you possibly" instead of "Do this."

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals navigate the complexities of social interaction through the strategic use of politeness strategies. By examining the relationship between politeness and cooperation, their theory sheds light on the intricate dynamics of communication and social relationships. Furthermore, their work has had a significant impact on various fields, including linguistics, sociology, psychology, and communication studies, contributing to our understanding of human behavior in social contexts. Their insights into how language functions in social interactions help explain not only everyday communication but also the subtleties of power dynamics, cultural variations, and interpersonal relationships.

However, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has centered on its claim to universality, which several scholars have challenged. One of the key criticisms is that their model is heavily based on Western cultural norms, particularly those of individualistic societies, and thus does not adequately account for the complexities of politeness across different cultures. For example, Matsumoto (1988) argues that Brown and Levinson's notion of "face" is not applicable in collectivist cultures like Japan, where social relationships and group harmony take precedence over individual autonomy. Similarly, Ide (1989) asserts that Brown and Levinson's theory fails to account for the concept of "discernment," a form of politeness more attuned to hierarchical structures, which is prevalent in many Asian societies. Furthermore, Eelen (2001) criticizes the binary categorization of politeness into positive and negative, claiming that politeness is far more dynamic and context-dependent than Brown and Levinson suggest. These critiques highlight the limitations of applying a universal politeness

model to diverse sociocultural contexts.

Having explored the intricacies of politeness strategies and their role in managing social interactions, the next theme of this work will delve into the first wave of impoliteness studies. This exploration will examine how scholars began to systematically study impoliteness, identifying the ways in which face-threatening acts and breaches of social norms contribute to our understanding of communication dynamics.

(Im)politeness Studies - First Wave

Culpeper (2014) acknowledged Geoffrey Leech as a pivotal figure in linguistic studies, particularly for his groundbreaking work on the pragmatics of politeness. Leech's significant contributions, notably his seminal work "Principles of Pragmatics" (POP) published in 1983, remain fundamental in understanding human communication and the intricacies of linguistic politeness (PEREIRA, 2022). In POP, Leech introduced the concept of the Politeness Principle (PP), which parallels Lakoff's (1973) earlier work and extends Grice's (1975) Cooperation Principle by incorporating an additional explanatory dimension.

Leech aimed to develop a theory specifically addressing the dynamics of polite and impolite interactions, which he felt Grice's principle failed to fully capture. Describing the PP as Leech's strategy for curbing the expression of discourteous beliefs while promoting courteous ones, Pereira (2022), referencing Leech (2014), underscores Leech's conceptualization of politeness as communicative goodwill. According to Leech, politeness involves actions that benefit others rather than oneself, encompassing behaviors that seem to offer benefits or value to another person.

In support of the PP's objective to mitigate impolite beliefs and promote polite ones, Leech proposed six maxims in his 1983 work, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of polite communication dynamics. This integration of Leech's insights into politeness theory enriches our understanding of how language shapes social interactions and relationships. The six maxims proposed by Leech are:

- **Tact Maxim:** Minimize cost to others; maximize benefit to others.
- **Generosity Maxim:** Minimize benefit to speaker; maximize cost to speaker.
- **Approval Maxim:** Minimize dispraise of others; maximize praise of others.
- **Modesty Maxim:** Minimize praise of speaker; maximize dispraise of speaker.

- **Agreement Maxim:** Minimize disagreement between speaker and others; maximize agreement between speaker and others.
- **Sympathy Maxim:** Minimize antipathy between speaker and others; maximize sympathy between speaker and others.

In his book “The Pragmatics of Politeness”, published in 2014, Geoffrey Leech revisited and expanded upon his seminal 1983 work “Principles of Pragmatics”, addressing critiques and further elaborating on the phenomenon of politeness and impoliteness. This revision saw Leech introducing four new maxims to his theoretical model. These additions encompass two post-politeness obligations, which include expressions of gratitude and apologies, along with their corresponding responses. Additionally, Leech incorporated two maxims related to negative politeness, specifically focusing on the maxims of emotional restraint and opinion restraint.

Leech’s framework introduces a range of maxims that function as subsets of a broader maxim termed the “General Strategy of Politeness” (GSP). According to this strategy, speakers convey or suggest meanings that either attribute a positive value to what is associated with others or a negative value to what is associated with themselves (LEECH, 2014, p. 90). Within this framework, Leech emphasizes the importance of certain maxims, such as those of tact and modesty, in facilitating mutual understanding among conversation participants.

Striking a balance between illocutionary aims (such as requesting permission, offering advice, or extending congratulations) and social aims, like fostering positive relationships, is crucial. Leech suggests that these illocutionary aims may either bolster or conflict with social aims. For instance, while complimenting someone aligns with social aims by being polite and enhancing relations, making a request or levying criticism may challenge the aim of maintaining social harmony. To clarify this dynamic, Leech categorizes speech acts into four groups based on their illocutionary function:

- **Competitive:** where the illocutionary aim is at odds with the social aim, such as commanding, requesting, demanding, or pleading.
- **Convivial:** where the illocutionary aim aligns with the social aim, such as making offers, inviting, greeting, expressing thanks, or congratulating.
- **Collaborative:** where the illocutionary aim is neutral in relation to the social aim, such as asserting, reporting, announcing, or instructing.
- **Conflictive:** where the illocutionary aim directly conflicts with the social aim, such as threatening, accusing, cursing, or scolding.

Leech (2014) highlights that the first two types of speech acts are closely linked to politeness. Acts falling under the competitive category inherently demand negative politeness as they impose the speaker's will on the listener, requiring softening to lessen the imposition. Conversely, acts in the convivial category are associated with positive politeness, elevating the listener's social standing by fostering social bonds.

Collaborative acts remain neutral in terms of politeness, neither advancing nor hindering social goals. On the other hand, conflictive acts typically eschew politeness, except in cases of irony where a direct affront is intended, negating the need for politeness (LEECH, 2014, p. 89-90). In examining the nuances of these speech acts and their relation to politeness, Leech's comprehensive framework not only underscores the complexity of polite interactions but also provides a structured approach to understanding how individuals manage their social identities and relationships through language.

The intricate balance of competing social aims and communicative goals highlights the adaptability and sophistication required in everyday interactions, reinforcing the significance of politeness as a fundamental aspect of human communication. Leech's contributions have significantly shaped the study of pragmatics, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms of language use and social behavior. Having established a detailed understanding of politeness strategies and their role in maintaining social harmony, the next theme of this work will address impoliteness formulae.

This exploration will delve into the specific ways in which impoliteness is articulated and understood in communication, examining the frameworks and theories that outline how breaches of politeness contribute to our comprehension of social dynamics and interpersonal conflicts. By comparing the principles of politeness with the formulae of impoliteness, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the entire range of human communication behavior.

Impoliteness Formulae

Various scholars have approached the study of (im)politeness differently. While Leech (1983) considered impoliteness peripheral to his primary focus on politeness, Brown & Levinson (1987) gave it limited attention within their comprehensive model of politeness. Culpeper's work, beginning with his seminal 1996 paper "Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness" and continuing with subsequent studies in 2005, has been instrumental in

introducing new concepts and exploring the intricate connection between impoliteness and emotions. His research sheds light on the impact of impolite behavior on social interactions and emphasizes the deliberate nature of such behavior.

Culpeper's contributions have significantly advanced the understanding of how impoliteness operates within communication, marking a substantial shift from the earlier, more limited discussions by Leech and Brown & Levinson. Culpeper (2011) defines impoliteness as communicative behavior that is designed to cause social disruption or offense, contrasting sharply with the goal of politeness, which seeks to maintain social harmony. He identifies specific formulae that people use to achieve impoliteness, similar to the formulae used for politeness but inverted to cause discomfort or offense. These formulae include direct insults, challenging the listener's face, and employing sarcasm or mock politeness to undermine the listener subtly.

By systematically categorizing these impoliteness expressions, Culpeper (2011) provides a robust framework for understanding how impoliteness operates in everyday communication. This detailed categorization not only highlights the varied methods through which impoliteness is conveyed but also underscores the intentionality behind such communicative acts. According to Culpeper, impoliteness is “a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts” (CULPEPER, 2011, p. 23). He proposes a framework for analyzing impoliteness that consists of five super formulae: bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness.

The author also identifies various triggers and functions of impoliteness, such as producing a deliberate face-attack, reinforcing power asymmetry and social distance and creating conflict. Culpeper's (2010) also notes that the need to manage one's identity and self-presentation in virtual communities is similar to face-work (GOFFMAN, 1967) in the offline world. Similarly, Spencer-Oatey (2008) elucidates that social connectedness in the online environment can be perceived from various perspectives.

According to the author, transactional goals (i.e., accomplishing a certain task) and relational goals (i.e., cultivating in-group solidarity) are two main types of interactional goals, which can lead to distinctive judgments of discursive appropriateness and social compliance. Therefore, face-work is a crucial part of social interaction, and this understanding is essential to navigating these communities.

Furthermore, Culpeper's exploration of impoliteness goes beyond mere classification; he delves into the psychological and emotional effects of impoliteness on individuals and the

broader social implications. His work highlights how impoliteness can be used strategically to assert power, control, or social dominance, and how it can lead to social conflicts and disruptions. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of impolite interactions and their consequences for social relationships.

By examining the emotional and psychological dimensions of impoliteness, Culpeper's research provides a nuanced view of how impoliteness functions not just as a breach of social norms, but as a deliberate strategy to influence and manipulate social dynamics. In his theoretical framework, Culpeper also emphasizes the context-dependent nature of impoliteness. He explores how cultural, situational, and relational factors influence the perception and impact of impolite behavior. This context-sensitive approach reveals that what may be considered impolite in one context may not be perceived the same way in another, highlighting the complexity and variability of impolite interactions.

Culpeper's work underscores the importance of understanding the situational and relational nuances that shape impolite communication, offering a richer and more detailed analysis of how impoliteness functions across different social settings. Alongside the same lines, Culpeper (2011) states that impoliteness is a socially relevant phenomenon for understanding how individuals relate to each other and, consequently, how human interactions are established in the digital environment. This definition sheds light on the interactive nature of impoliteness, broadening our understanding of the underlying dynamics in impolite exchanges.

It is not only a matter of recognizing impolite acts, but also of examining how the involved parties interpret and respond to the perceived offense. This approach emphasizes the importance of studying impoliteness in the context of an ongoing conversation to capture its effects and the reactions they trigger (PEREIRA 2022; CULPEPER 2005). By examining impoliteness in real-time interactions, researchers can better understand how these behaviors impact communication dynamics and the subsequent responses from those involved.

Building on this foundation, Culpeper (2010, 2011) has proposed nine categories to classify impoliteness. The first three categories (insults, specific criticisms/complaints, impertinent/unpleasant questions and or assumptions) correspond to the super-strategy of positive impoliteness, while the remaining six (condescension, message executors, dismissals, silencers, threats, and curses/ill wishes) correspond to negative impoliteness. These conventionalized formulae have been organized according to Culpeper (2011, p. 135) and are shown in Table 1. This classification helps in systematically analyzing various impolite behaviors and their specific roles within conversations.

Table of conventionalized impoliteness formulae (Table 1)

Insults	Personalized negative vocatives	-[you][fucking/rotten/dirty/fat/little/etc.][moron/fuck/ plonker/dickhead/berk/pig/shit/bastard/loser/liar/mi nx/brat/slut/squirt/sod/bugger/etc.][you]
	Personalized negative assertions	-[you][are][so/such a][shit/stink/thick/stupid/bitchy/bitch/hypocrite/disappoint ment/gay/nuts/nuttier than a fruit cake/hopeless/pathetic/fussy/terrible/fat/ugly/etc.] - [you] [can't do] [anything right/basic arithmetic/etc.] - [you] [disgust me] / [make me] [sick/etc.]
	Personalized negative references	-[your][stinking/little][mouth/act/arse/body/corpse/ hands/ guts/trap/breath/etc.]
	Personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)	- [the] [daft] [bimbo] - [she][']s [nutzo]

Pointed criticisms/complaints	-[that/this/it][is/was][absolutely/extraordinarily/unspe akably/ etc.][bad/rubbish/crap/horrible/terrible/etc.]
Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions	- why do you make my life impossible? - which lie are you telling me? - what's gone wrong now? - you want to argue with me or you want to go to jail? - I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience.

Condescensions (see also the use of 'little' in Insults)	– [that] ['s/ is being] [babyish/childish/etc.]
Message enforcers	– listen here (preface) – you got [it/that]? (tag) – do you understand [me]? (tag)
Dismissals	– [go] [away] – [get] [lost/out] – [fuck/piss/shove] [off]
Silencers	–[shut] [it] / [your] [stinking/fucking/etc.] [mouth/face/trap/etc.] – shut [the fuck] up
Threats	– [I'll/I'm/we're] [gonna] [smash your face in/beat the shit out of you/box your ears/bust your fucking head off/straighten you out/etc.] [if you don't] [X] – [you'd better be ready Friday the 20th to meet with me/do it] [or] [else] [I'll][X] – [X] [before I] [hit you/strangle you]
Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill-wishes)	– [go] [to hell/hang yourself/fuck yourself] – [damn/fuck] [you]

(Written by Culpeper, 2011)

Similarly, Culpeper and Tantucci (2021) have explored the role of (im)politeness reciprocity . They argue that (im)politeness can be used to express disagreement or criticism, but it can also be used to express solidarity and reciprocity within a community. This happens, for example, when co-workers utter a bunter to signal intimacy (BOUSFIELD, 2010).

To clearly define the scope of impoliteness, Culpeper (2011) outlined certain characteristics that should not be confused with impoliteness:

- Impoliteness is distinct from accidental face threats.
- Impoliteness is intentional, not accidental.
- Impoliteness is not synonymous with humor.

- Impoliteness is not straightforward communication without any polite mitigation.

As we could see, impoliteness is often viewed as a negative force aimed at tarnishing an individual's public image and disrupting social harmony (CUNHA, OLIVEIRA, 2020; BLITVICH, 2022). However, it has been reconsidered through the lenses of entertainment by scholars like Culpeper (2011) and Dynel (2013). These scholars explore how impoliteness can be strategically employed in media and entertainment contexts to engage audiences, create humor, and develop character dynamics.

This perspective shifts the focus from impoliteness as merely disruptive to recognizing its potential for social bonding and entertainment value. Building on these insights, the next section will delve into the concept of entertaining impoliteness. It will examine how impoliteness is utilized in various forms of media, such as television, films, and online platforms, to captivate audiences and enhance storytelling. This exploration will consider the ways in which impoliteness can be contextually appropriate and even appreciated by audiences, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of impolite behavior in entertainment. By understanding the role of impoliteness in media, we can gain a more nuanced perspective on its functions and effects, extending our comprehension of (im)politeness beyond traditional social interactions.

Humor in Online Communication

Dynel (2013) suggests that impoliteness can captivate bystanders, eliciting feelings of superiority and pleasure. Dynel's exploration (2013) into the psychology of humor further elucidates that mocking others can serve as a source of amusement, particularly within certain social circles_ a notion supported by the superiority theory of humor (DYNEL, 2013). Consequently, the concept of mock impoliteness emerges as a synthesis of ridicule and mockery, both mechanisms aimed at poking fun at the target while solidifying bonds among spectators (DYNEL, 2013; DYNEL, ZAPPAVIGNA, 2023). This paradigm shift invites a deeper examination of how impoliteness intersects with social dynamics and human behavior, challenging conventional notions of its purely negative impact.

Given that social practices are guided by linguistic rules of conduct that dictate how individuals should interact with each other, politeness can be seen as a "normal course of actions" (GARFINKEL, 1964: 225). This includes "routine exchanges and mutual greetings, farewells, favors and thanks, requests and compliances, assertions and acknowledgments" (CULPEPER, TANTUCCI, 2021: 151-152), which serve to show affiliations and cooperation.

On the other hand, insults, sarcasm, and negative statements can also play a significant role, especially in the digital realm (TAGG et al., 2017).

In contrast to genuine impoliteness, there is mock impoliteness, which comprises impolite forms whose effects are largely nullified by the context (the term "mock impoliteness" is used by Leech, (1983a); see also Bernal, (2008) for a discussion on genuine versus non-genuine impoliteness). This involves negative attitudes triggered by in-context behaviors associated with impoliteness terminology (e.g., impolite, rude, discourteous). For instance, saying "Go to hell please" to dismiss someone might be seen as interpersonally negative, despite the use of a conventional politeness marker. This phrase derives its impact because "please" conventionally signifies politeness (CULPEPER, 2011: 33-34).

Mock impoliteness, also known as banter or jocular mockery, is a communicative formula where speakers intentionally use language that appears impolite on the surface but is understood as playful or humorous by all parties involved. This form of interaction often serves to strengthen social bonds and create a sense of camaraderie among participants. As Leech (1983) suggests, mock impoliteness can function as a way to reinforce social cohesion by allowing individuals to engage in face-threatening acts within a safe and consensual context. It relies heavily on shared knowledge and mutual understanding, ensuring that the apparent rudeness is not taken seriously and does not cause offense.

The effectiveness of mock impoliteness hinges on several factors, including the relationship between the interlocutors and the context of the interaction. Culpeper (1996) notes that close relationships and informal settings are more conducive to the successful use of mock impoliteness. In such environments, participants are more likely to recognize and appreciate the humor behind the ostensibly impolite remarks. The playful nature of mock impoliteness allows individuals to navigate social hierarchies and power dynamics in a non-threatening manner, often serving as a means of subverting traditional norms of politeness and formality.

Furthermore, mock impoliteness can serve various social functions, such as signaling in-group membership, testing the boundaries of social tolerance, and managing group dynamics. Dynel (2008) points out that by engaging in banter, individuals can demonstrate their wit and social competence, thereby enhancing their status within the group. This form of interaction also provides an opportunity for participants to negotiate and redefine social norms, as the playful nature of mock impoliteness allows for a greater degree of flexibility and creativity in communication. However, the use of mock impoliteness is not without risks.

There is always the potential for misunderstandings, especially in cases where the

intended humor is not recognized or appreciated by all parties involved. Bousfield (2008) highlights that when mock impoliteness is misinterpreted, it can lead to genuine offense and conflict. Therefore, the successful use of mock impoliteness requires a high degree of social awareness and sensitivity to the reactions of others.

In online communities, the use of mock impoliteness can be particularly complex due to the absence of non-verbal cues and the potential for diverse interpretations of textual communication. Hardaker (2010) observes that the lack of immediate feedback in online interactions can increase the likelihood of misunderstandings and unintended offense. Nevertheless, when used effectively, mock impoliteness in digital contexts can foster a sense of belonging and mutual understanding among participants, mirroring its functions in face-to-face interactions.

In summary, mock impoliteness is a nuanced and multifaceted communicative formula that relies on shared understanding and contextual appropriateness. While it can serve to strengthen social bonds and facilitate creative expression, it also carries the risk of misinterpretation and conflict. The successful navigation of mock impoliteness requires a keen awareness of social dynamics and the ability to read and respond to the cues of others, whether in face-to-face or online interactions.

Building on the discussion of mock impoliteness, it is essential to explore the related but distinct concept of sarcasm. While sarcasm often overlaps with mock impoliteness, it encompasses a broader range of communicative functions and carries its own set of complexities and risks. The next section will delve into the intricacies of sarcasm, examining its role in communication, its potential effects on social interactions, and the various interpretations it can elicit in both face-to-face and digital environments.

Sarcasm

Sarcasm in digital environments is a complex form of communication that involves saying the opposite of what one means, often to convey contempt or mockery. This complexity is heightened in digital contexts due to the lack of vocal tone, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues that typically help convey sarcastic intent. According to Dynel (2014), sarcasm is a type of verbal irony where the intended meaning is opposite to the literal meaning of the words used. This incongruity between the literal and intended meanings is what gives sarcasm its distinctive edge.

Sarcasm can be viewed as mock politeness, meaning the politeness is not perceived as

sincere (cf. Culpeper, (1996), referencing Leech, (1983a)). The conveyed message is mixed: some elements, like the use of polite expressions, imply politeness, while other elements, typically contextual or co-textual, imply impoliteness. For example, in one of Culpeper's case studies, a Lancaster University staff member, in a complaint about someone backing into her car and leaving, ends with "Thank you SO VERY MUCH." The capitalization here is significant, akin to the tone of voice in spoken language. Sarcastic messages often involve multiple modes: the verbal content conflicts with the tone or visual cues. In all such cases, the overall interpretation should lean towards the elements suggesting impoliteness, with the polite words serving as a superficial layer, highlighting the disparity between the polite context and the actual impolite situation.

In digital communication, such as social media, emails, and text messages, the absence of non-verbal cues can make sarcasm more difficult to detect and interpret. Research by Hancock (2004) highlights that the lack of immediate feedback and paralinguistic signals in online environments often leads to misunderstandings. Without the vocal inflections or facial expressions that typically accompany sarcasm, the intended irony may be missed, resulting in confusion or unintended offense.

Off-record impoliteness, also known as implicature-based impoliteness, emerged prominently in the data. This term is often synonymous with mock politeness and aligns with what Leech (1983) describes as "irony." According to Dynel (2013), some researchers, particularly from the United States, prefer to use "sarcasm" as a term synonymous with "irony." However, sarcasm does not always exhibit the defining features of irony. For instance, sarcasm may not involve meaning opposition or convey critical evaluation through implicature, which are central to irony.

Speakers often use verbal irony to subtly refer to and distance themselves from the attitudes of others in context (KREUZ, GLUCKSBERG, 1989; WILSON 2006; SPERBER, WILSON, 2012). Additionally, speakers may use sarcasm to showcase their wit and superiority, particularly on social media, where they can entertain themselves rather than aiming to amuse others (BLITVICH, 2013; BOU-FRANC, BLITVICH, 2014).

In online environments, the humorous potential of sarcasm is especially significant in multi-party interactions, extending beyond the typical speaker-listener dyad. In these settings, impoliteness can have different meanings and effects depending on listeners' participatory status and relationship to the target (DYNEL, 2013). Dynel (2013) also notes that Culpeper (2010) views sarcasm as a subset of irony that produces negative interpersonal effects. However, other linguistic studies see sarcasm as a broader concept that does not necessarily

focus on pretended (im)politeness or irony.

Researchers have explored the communicative effects of sarcasm, debating whether it amplifies or mitigates negative evaluation, with diverse findings due to varying methodologies and examples used in studies. As such, sarcasm is a concept with fuzzy boundaries in linguistic literature, often described as “cutting, contemptuous, and ‘biting’ remarks, delivered often in a hostile manner” (BERGER 1998: 49) when the speaker's primary aim is to cause verbal harm.

Sarcasm in digital environments can serve various social functions, from expressing criticism indirectly to reinforcing in-group cohesion. According to Gibbs (2000), the shared understanding required to decode sarcasm can strengthen in-group ties, as it creates a sense of insider knowledge and mutual comprehension. In online communities, sarcasm can be used to establish group norms and signal membership. However, this same reliance on shared context can make sarcasm exclusionary, potentially alienating those who do not grasp the intended irony.

Despite these challenges, sarcasm remains a prevalent and influential form of communication in digital environments. Burgers, et. al. (2011) note that sarcasm can enhance the expressive richness of digital communication, allowing users to convey complex emotions and social cues. When used effectively, sarcasm can add a layer of humor and wit to online interactions, making them more engaging and dynamic.

While politeness is generally viewed as a means to demonstrate affiliations and foster cooperation through routine exchanges and mutual acknowledgments (CULCUPER, TANTUCCI, 2021), impoliteness also plays a complex and multifaceted role in social interactions. Particularly in the digital sphere, where the dynamics of communication can be more nuanced and layered (TAGG et al., 2017), both genuine and mock impoliteness can emerge.

Mock impoliteness, such as sarcasm, can serve as a mechanism to navigate and negotiate social bonds, often adding a layer of complexity to interpersonal communication (CULPEPER, 2011). By mixing polite and impolite elements, sarcasm and similar forms of communication can actually reinforce relationships through shared understanding and mutual recognition of the underlying context. Thus, the strategic use of impoliteness can sometimes strengthen bonds, creating a sense of camaraderie and intimacy that transcends conventional politeness.

Having examined the role of sarcasm as a nuanced form of impoliteness within the Darvey fandom, it is evident that sarcasm serves multiple functions, from expressing

disapproval and criticism to navigating social hierarchies and fostering in-group solidarity. However, sarcasm is just one aspect of the broader spectrum of humor in communication. The next section will delve deeper into the multifaceted nature of humor, exploring how it operates in various communicative contexts.

Humor in Communication

Humor in online communication has become an increasingly prominent area of study, reflecting the complexities of digital interactions. The unique attributes of online environments, such as anonymity, the potential for rapid dissemination, and the asynchronous nature of communication, create a fertile ground for the use of humor (HERRING, 2013). In digital contexts, humor serves various functions, from social bonding to conflict mitigation and identity performance. Understanding these functions requires a comprehensive examination of how humor operates in online spaces and its effects on user interactions and community dynamics.

One significant aspect of humor in online communication is its role in community building. According to Baym (2015), humor helps establish a sense of camaraderie among users, fostering group cohesion and creating a shared cultural context. For instance, inside jokes and memes circulate within online communities, reinforcing group identity and providing a sense of belonging. This form of humor acts as a social glue, bringing individuals together in a virtual space where physical presence is absent.

By creating a shared language and set of references, humor helps users navigate the vast and often impersonal landscape of the internet, making it feel more like a community. Moreover, the repetition and modification of humorous content like memes allow for continuous engagement and participation, keeping the community vibrant and dynamic. Humor also plays a critical role in managing conflicts and negotiating social boundaries online. Dynel (2013) suggests that humorous exchanges can defuse tension and allow participants to navigate potentially contentious interactions more gracefully. This is particularly relevant on social media platforms and online forums where diverse opinions often clash.

By using humor, individuals can mitigate the impact of disagreements and maintain a more amicable atmosphere. Humor provides a way to address sensitive topics without escalating conflict, serving as a buffer that can soften the blow of criticism or disagreement. This strategic use of humor to manage conflicts highlights its versatility as a communicative

tool in digital environments. Furthermore, humor in online communication is a powerful tool for identity construction and performance. Individuals use humor to express their personalities, signal group affiliations, and distinguish themselves from others. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, where individuals curate their online personas through various means, including humor.

For example, witty comments and humorous posts can enhance one's social capital within an online community, showcasing intelligence and creativity. The ability to craft and deliver humor effectively can elevate a user's status and influence within the community, making humor a crucial aspect of online social interactions. The asynchronous nature of online communication also affects the dynamics of humor. Unlike face-to-face interactions, where humor is immediate and context-dependent, online humor can be more deliberate and crafted. Shifman (2013) notes that the viral nature of internet humor, such as memes, allows for repeated sharing and reinterpretation, adding layers of meaning and collective creativity. This iterative process can amplify the humorous impact and engage a broader audience over time.

The ability to revisit and remix humorous content contributes to its longevity and appeal, making humor a pervasive element of online culture. This extended engagement with humorous content also allows for a deeper exploration of its themes and variations, fostering a rich tapestry of online humor. However, the use of humor online is not without its challenges. Misinterpretations are common, given the lack of non-verbal cues that typically accompany humorous expressions in face-to-face communication (WALTHER, 2011). What one person finds amusing, another might perceive as offensive or inappropriate, leading to potential conflicts and misunderstandings.

This underscores the importance of contextual awareness and cultural sensitivity in crafting and interpreting online humor. The diverse and global nature of online audiences means that humor must be navigated carefully to avoid alienating or offending others. The risk of misinterpretation highlights the delicate balance required in using humor effectively in digital spaces.

In conclusion, humor is a multifaceted element of online communication, serving to build community, manage conflict, and perform identity. Its effectiveness and impact are shaped by the unique characteristics of digital environments, such as anonymity, rapid dissemination, and asynchronous interaction. While humor can enhance social bonds and facilitate positive interactions, it also requires careful navigation to avoid miscommunication and offense. As online communication continues to evolve, the study of humor will remain

crucial in understanding the social dynamics of digital interactions. This comprehensive understanding of humor's role in online communication underscores its significance as both a social and cultural phenomenon.

Having explored the role of humor in online communication, the next theme will delve into the complex interplay between identity and online discourse. This upcoming section will examine how individuals construct and perform their identities in digital environments, the strategies they employ, and the implications for social interactions and community dynamics. By understanding the nuances of identity in online discourse, we can gain deeper insights into the broader implications of digital communication in shaping human interaction and societal structures.

Third-party Criticism in Online Forums

Third-party criticism in online forums, particularly when directed at fictional characters, serves several unique functions in social and organizational contexts. Such discussions often allow forum members to engage deeply with narratives and character development, providing a platform for analytical discourse and communal bonding. When users express disapproval or criticism about fictional characters, they are frequently exploring broader themes such as morality, decision-making, and personality traits. This can foster a collective sense of shared values and enhance the critical thinking skills of participants (JENKIN, 2006). By delving into these critiques, participants not only dissect the elements of storytelling but also reflect on their own ethical and philosophical beliefs, creating a dynamic and intellectually stimulating environment.

One positive function of third-party criticism about fictional characters is the enhancement of community engagement. Fans gather in online forums to dissect storylines, critique character arcs, and speculate on future developments. This type of interaction not only strengthens the community but also allows for a deeper appreciation of the media being discussed (HILLS, 2002). Additionally, these discussions can promote empathy as participants consider the motivations and circumstances of various characters, even those they criticize (JENKINS, 2006). This empathetic engagement can lead to more nuanced discussions, where fans explore complex character motivations and the impact of narrative decisions, thereby enriching their understanding of the text.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of these forums encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives, which can lead to more comprehensive and multifaceted interpretations

of the media. Fans often bring in different cultural, social, and personal backgrounds to the conversation, enriching the collective analysis and enhancing the overall engagement with the content (HILLS, 2002). This collective scrutiny can reveal underlying themes and hidden details that may not be immediately apparent, thus deepening the overall appreciation and understanding of the work (Jenkins, 2006). Through this process, fans contribute to a richer, more diversified interpretation of the narrative, highlighting its multifaceted nature and broadening the scope of its impact.

These forums also serve as a space for creative expression and fan contributions. Discussions about third-party criticism often inspire fan fiction, fan art, and other creative projects that extend the life of the media beyond its original form. This not only keeps the community active and engaged but also allows fans to explore alternative narratives and character developments, thereby expanding the fictional universe in ways that the original creators might not have envisioned (HILLS, 2002). Such creative endeavors demonstrate the active participation of fans in the storytelling process, blurring the lines between creator and consumer and fostering a participatory culture.

Moreover, the act of critiquing fictional characters in a communal setting can provide a safe outlet for individuals to express their thoughts and emotions. It can be cathartic for fans to discuss what they perceive as flaws or strengths of the characters, once it allows them to process their own reactions and connect with others who share similar views. This shared experience can strengthen bonds among community members, creating a sense of solidarity and mutual support (JENKINS, 2006). The communal nature of these discussions can lead to strong emotional connections, as fans find comfort and validation in knowing that others share their perspectives and feelings.

However, there are negative aspects as well. Intense criticism of fictional characters can sometimes spill over into hostility towards other fans or creators, especially if there are disagreements about the interpretation of a character or storyline. Furthermore, the anonymity of online forums can exacerbate the harshness of criticism, as users may feel emboldened to express negative opinions without fear of repercussions (LAPIDOT-LEFLER, BARAK, 2012). The phenomenon of online disinhibition, where anonymity leads to reduced self-regulation and increased negative behaviors, plays a significant role in amplifying the severity of third-party criticism (SULER, 2004). This can result in prolonged and unresolved conflicts, as well as persistent negative sentiments that overshadow positive interactions within the community.

Moreover, intense criticism and negativity can have a demoralizing effect on content

creators. When creators see their work harshly critiqued or misinterpreted, it can lead to creative burnout, reduced motivation, and even withdrawal from social media and fan interactions (CONDIS, 2018). This not only affects the creators personally but can also impact the quality and frequency of new content being produced, thereby affecting the entire fan community. This can lead to severe emotional and psychological distress for the individuals involved, further exacerbating the negative impact on the community as a whole.

Overall, third-party criticism of fictional characters in online forums is a multifaceted phenomenon that can enhance community engagement and content development while also posing risks of conflict and negativity. While these discussions can foster deeper engagement with the media and strengthen community bonds, they also require careful moderation and a culture of respect to prevent toxic behavior and ensure a positive, inclusive environment.

Having explored the dynamics and implications of third-party criticism in online forums, the next theme will delve into the methodology employed in this research. This section will outline the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to examine the complex interactions within online communities. By understanding the methodological framework, we can appreciate the rigor and depth of the study, ensuring that the findings are robust and reliable.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, I will describe the procedures used for selecting and collecting the corpus, as well as the analytical approach based on qualitative methods. The section is organized as follows: first, an explanation of the corpus selection and collection process; second, a description of the qualitative analytical framework for studying interactions. Finally, I will provide a brief summary of the series from which the fanfictions were derived to enhance the context of the posted comments.

We share the view, similar to Henrich and Holmes (2013), in which comments serve as a valuable data source reflecting public opinion. They provide insights into how opinions and beliefs are disseminated and nurtured in the digital realm. Consequently, our research corpus comprises 19,212 comments posted on 830 fanfictions created between the year of 2019 and 2021, published in the platform Fanfiction.net. The selection criteria for this corpus were carefully established as follows:

- Selection criteria for platform
- Selection of Television Series

- Search Terms for Identifying (Im)politeness and Presence of (Im)politeness Markers

Selection criteria for platform

In a research such as the one presented here, corpus selection can be guided by two main criteria. The first involves selecting comments from a single source, such as a specific community table on a social network. Alternatively, researchers may consider a broader range of digital communication platforms, spanning multiple social networks. The latter approach allows for a more diverse set of guidelines and potentially different follower profiles.

For this study, the first criterion was chosen, focusing on a single social network. This decision was driven by the research objective, which did not require differentiation between impolitenesses across various platforms. Additionally, the volume of accesses received was used as a parameter for selecting the platform, ensuring that commentators from that source are well represented (HENRICH, HOLMES, 2013).

Fanfiction.net, a venerable platform in the world of fan-created content, offers a straightforward interface that prioritizes functionality over aesthetics. While its design may not be visually sophisticated, it remains a beloved choice for fanfiction enthusiasts due to its content-centric approach and active community engagement. Upon visiting Fanfiction.net, users encounter a menu bar containing essential options such as “Home,” “Just In,” “Community,” and “Forum.” These options facilitate navigation to different sections of the site based on user preferences. Whether seeking recently published stories or looking to engage in community discussions, the homepage provides clear pathways.

The choice to use Fanfiction.net for this study, rather than Archive of Our Own (AO3) or Wattpad is grounded in several key factors. Firstly, the author of this study was part of the Darvey community on Twitter/X and was aware that the majority of the community interacted primarily on Fanfiction.net. This platform has become the central hub for Darvey fanfiction, making it the most relevant and rich source of data for this research.

In terms of content volume, Fanfiction.net hosts a significantly larger collection of “Suits-USA” fanfiction compared to AO3 and Wattpad. As of the latest data, Fanfiction.net features over 2,500 stories related to “Suits-USA,” whereas AO3 has around 1,200 stories, and Wattpad hosts approximately 800 stories. This substantial difference in content volume indicates that Fanfiction.net is the preferred platform for the majority of Darvey fanfiction writers and readers. Moreover, the number of comments on Fanfiction.net is considerably higher, reflecting more active engagement and discussion among users.

On Fanfiction.net, stories often garner hundreds of comments, providing a wealth of interaction data crucial for analyzing (im)politeness practices within the community. In contrast, stories on AO3 and Wattpad generally receive fewer comments, which would limit the depth of qualitative analysis possible in this study. The search functionality is also a crucial feature. A search bar allows users to locate specific stories or authors by entering relevant keywords. Additionally, advanced search options enable precise filtering based on criteria such as genre, characters, and word count.

Whether searching for a specific fandom or exploring new content, these tools enhance the user experience. Once a story that piques interest is found, clicking on its title opens the full text for reading. The main page displays a list of story titles along with summaries and relevant metadata. Users can actively engage by leaving reviews, expressing their thoughts, and adding stories to their favorites or follow lists. This interaction fosters a sense of community and encourages writers and readers alike.

For those who wish to contribute their own fanfiction works, Fanfiction.net provides a straightforward publishing interface. Registered users can enter the story's title, summary, content, and relevant categorization and tags. The process is efficient, allowing authors to focus on their creative expression without unnecessary complexities. User profiles play a significant role, showcasing an author's published works, favorite stories, and affiliations with specific communities. Users can customize their profiles, reflecting their preferences and interests. These profiles serve as a hub for connecting with other fans and sharing common interests.

Lastly, Fanfiction.net offers a mobile app designed for smaller screens. This app allows users to read and write fanfiction on the go, ensuring accessibility and convenience. Given this user-friendly environment, it became evident that Fanfiction.net was the ideal platform for data collection in this study. A manual approach was employed to collect comments from the Fanfiction.net page about the Suits-USA series. This involved systematically navigating through the website, selecting all comments using keyboard shortcuts (Ctrl+A, Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V), and pasting them into a text file (TXT). The process was repeated for each page of comments, ensuring comprehensive data collection. Comments were gathered from the fanfictions, maintaining consistency and allowing for a representative sample. The sequential order of comments within each fanfiction was preserved to accurately reflect their original appearance on the website, as this sequencing may hold relevance to the analysis.

This methodology ensured the systematic collection of data while considering the

structure and organization of the fanfiction website. Below, the criteria adopted for selecting the series in which the fanfictions were written will be outlined. This structured approach provides clarity on the selection process, ensuring a focused and relevant analysis of impoliteness in the chosen corpus.

Research Scope

In formulating the methodology for this thesis, the decision has been made to investigate the domain of (im)polite comments within the Darvey fandom, specifically concentrating on fanfictions associated with “SUITS-USA.” This choice is informed by extensive involvement in the Darvey community over an extended period, offering significant insights into its dynamics and communication patterns. Drawing upon this familiarity, a qualitative approach has been adopted to authentically capture the nuances of fan interactions.

By selecting comments in fanfictions about this TV series as the primary source of data, the aim is to ensure the relevance and richness necessary for a comprehensive analysis. These narratives serve as a medium through which fans explore and elaborate upon the themes, characters, and narratives of “SUITS-USA,” rendering them well-suited for an examination of (im)politeness within the fandom.

The methodology entails a systematic analysis of comments on these fanfictions to identify instances of (im)politeness, taking into consideration factors such as language, tone, and comment context. This approach facilitates an exploration of the manifestation of (im)politeness within the community, an understanding of the underlying dynamics, and an assessment of the impact on discourse and community cohesion. By triangulating the findings with existing literature on fan cultures and online communities, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of (im)polite communication practices within the Darvey fandom. This methodology, grounded in qualitative analysis and informed by insider perspectives, ensures rigor and depth in the examination of fan interactions within the context of “SUITS-USA” fanfictions.

The chosen period for selecting comments spans from the 830 fanfictions selected from December 2019 to 2021, focusing on content published on the Fanfiction.net platform. Overall, the platform holds around 2,100 Darvey fanfiction. This timeframe is significant due to increased social media activity by fans following the conclusion of the “SUITS-USA” series in September 2019. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic led to heightened usage of social networks during this period, providing a robust dataset for analysis. By examining this

specific period, the research captures a critical moment of heightened engagement and interaction within the fandom, offering a rich context for understanding the dynamics of (im)politeness.

In the upcoming section, the focus will shift to the search terms used for identifying (im)politeness and the presence of (im)politeness markers within the comments. This will include a detailed discussion of the criteria and methods employed to detect and categorize instances of (im)politeness, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the data.

Search Terms for Identifying (Im)politeness

Henrich and Holmes (2013, p. 3) emphasize the necessity of an additional criterion for selecting comments to form a research corpus. This criterion is essential to discern which comments, from the multitude published in response to a post, should be included in the corpus. In our initial corpus selection, which included 19,215 comments, we aimed to analyze comments that exhibited signs of (im)politeness. Consequently, we narrowed down the selection to comments that displayed markers of (im)politeness.

This was achieved by uploading all 19,215 comments from the 830 fanfictions selected to Sketch Engine, and generating a wordlist containing 777.028 terms to identify the first 2000 that appeared most frequently. From these terms, it was selected 17 that were perceived to be indicators of impoliteness. We then applied two frameworks for further analysis: the formulae and conventionalized forms of impoliteness developed by Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011), (refer to Table 1). Utilizing both frameworks provided a consistent method for data classification.

Subsequently, a manual inspection was conducted, whereby each term flagged as impolite was reviewed to identify its occurrences. This manual inspection involved scanning through the comments until encountering words or phrases that could potentially express impoliteness, as determined by contextual understanding and linguistic analysis. By leveraging the Sketch Engine tools, a comprehensive approach was employed to systematically identify impolite expressions within the dataset, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative examination for robust data interpretation.

However, Culpeper (2011, p. 136) cautions that the lists and categories of impoliteness super strategies are reflective of British cultural norms (e.g., TV programs, television series, student questionnaires) and should not be considered a definitive, unchangeable set to be applied without proper consideration of the data's nature and the context under analysis. In

selecting and categorizing comments for our corpus, we also considered cultural aspects from the fandom's perspective, such as community norms, shared values, and moral standards. This ensured that the analysis was contextually relevant and reflective of the specific dynamics within the Darvey fandom.

The selection of these specific terms was based on their frequency and the potential to flag comments as impolite. A detailed explanation for each element from the table, their selection criteria, and their implications are going to be done in future sections of this study:

Table 2 - Most frequent conventionalized (im)polite formulae.

#	Wordlist ranking	(Im)polite Formulae	Number of occurrences
1	506	Fucking	169
2	626	Fuck	114
3	694	Crazy	94
4	786	Idiot(s)	78
5	1002	Mad	56
6	1111	Weird	48
7	1338	Stupid	36
8	1459	Cruel	32
19	1512	WTF	30
10	1530	Terrible	29
11	1531	Sick	29
12	1564	Insane	28
13	1651	Shitty	26
14	1661	Awful	26
15	1830	Bitch	24
16	1853	Evil	22
17	1893	Pissed	21

Source: Author

After analyzing the comments that contained the terms listed in Table 2, it was possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the contextual factors that influence impolite discourse within the fan community, particularly concerning character dynamics and audience reception within the fanfiction narrative framework of “SUITS-USA.” By examining comments through the lens of fan culture and fanfiction communities, it becomes evident that fans often develop strong emotional attachments to fictional characters and narratives. These attachments can lead to intense reactions when their expectations are not met or when they perceive deviations from their desired outcomes.

However, after reading all comments containing the terms flagged as impolite, it was also observed that not all impoliteness formulae were used to convey impoliteness. Such emotional investments in characters and storylines result in passionate and sometimes impolite discourse as fans express their dissatisfaction or critique elements that do not align with their preferences. The context of fanfiction amplifies these reactions, as fan-created content often invites reinterpretation and reimagining of canonical narratives, further fueling discussions and debates. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for comprehensively analyzing the nature and impact of impolite comments within the Darvey fandom.

This approach not only illuminates the reasons behind the impoliteness observed but also highlights the broader implications for community interactions and cohesion. By situating these comments within the cultural practices of fanfiction communities, the research aims to uncover the underlying motivations and social dynamics that drive such discourse. This deeper understanding is essential for grasping how impoliteness functions as a communicative formula within these unique online environments.

Regarding the ethical issues involved in the research, given the non-invasive nature of the collected data, and following Dynel (2023), it is assumed that no one will be harmed or embarrassed by this study. Furthermore, the analyzed comments were published on open accounts, accessible to the public without the need for a password. Nevertheless, all authorship marks were removed from the posts to ensure anonymity, as the research focused on the content of the messages rather than their authors.

In the following section, the focus will shift to the analysis itself. This part of the study will present the findings from the qualitative examination of comments, identifying the most frequent impoliteness formulae and exploring their specific instances. Each formula will be detailed with examples, categorized and structured to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of their usage and variations. This analysis will shed light on the patterns of impolite discourse within the Darvey fandom, offering insights into the interplay between fan

engagement, narrative expectations, and community dynamics.

ANALYSIS

In this section, the examples for the qualitative analysis were selected based on the table of impoliteness formulae. The topics are structured according to the order of terms in Table 2 (page 56). This analysis examines comments containing the most frequent impoliteness formulae, following their sequence in the word list.

Commentators often offer compliments to the authors of the fanfictions as a preparatory context for enacting impoliteness. While these compliments are acknowledged, the primary focus is on the impoliteness directed at third parties, specifically the characters. This approach ensures a targeted examination of how impoliteness manifests within the comments, providing a clearer understanding of its impact on the community and character perception. Each formula is going to be presented with its respective examples. This structured method allows for a detailed and organized presentation of the impoliteness formulae and their specific instances, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their usage and variations.

When coding the data, the numbers refer to the impolite formulae from Table 2 (page 56), with a brief explanation of where they fall on the impoliteness scope. The letters correspond to the comments that exemplify their usage. Examining these formulae through the lens of Culpeper's impoliteness formulae, the study aims to uncover patterns of impolite discourse and understand their impact on community dynamics and character perception. This analysis provides insights into the emotional and evaluative landscape of the fandom, illustrating how fans interact with the narrative and each other. In the following sections, for each extract, we provide the reader with background information about the characters and/or the plot, before we analyze the sample drawing from the models of (im)politeness. In addition, we highlighted in red the key expressions of (im)politeness found in the comments and discussed their significance in shaping interactions within the community.

1. Fucking (169 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 506)

The term "fucking" was selected due to its high frequency and its strong connotation of vulgarity and emotional intensity. Its use often signals strong emotional responses such as anger, frustration, or excitement. This formula can be categorized as a **negative expressive** that enhances the force of an insult or criticism, thereby intensifying the impoliteness. Its

frequent appearance highlights the prevalence of intense emotional expression within the fandom.

a. I LOVEEE ITT And please let Paula pay And Harvey & Donna be together when this **fucking** shit is over hahaha but i love ittt! </s><s> Darvey moments are very welcome. </s><s> And can't wait for another update. </s><s> Pls soon!

Character's background:

Donna Paulsen: A smart, witty legal secretary and later COO at Pearson Specter Litt, with a deep, evolving relationship with Harvey Specter.

Harvey Specter: A top corporate lawyer known for his charisma and legal prowess, and his complex, significant bond with Donna Paulsen.

Paula Agard: A therapist who briefly dates Harvey, creating tension due to his close relationship with Donna. Often seen as an antagonist.

Comment analyses:

The term “fucking” is used here to intensify the emotional expression of frustration, reflecting deep engagement with the narrative. This use of strong language aligns with Culpeper’s impoliteness formulae, where “fucking” serves as a negative expressive to amplify the impact of the comment. Despite the intensity, the playful tone that follows creates a balance between frustration and affection, mitigating and reflecting mock impoliteness.

This emotional response engages the community by inviting shared dramatic moments and anticipation for more updates, fostering a sense of shared experience. Dynel's study further illuminates the intricate dynamics of sarcasm and humor in online communication. According to Dynel (2014), sarcasm involves saying the opposite of what one means, often to convey contempt or mockery, and relies heavily on contextual and social cues for its interpretation.

In this comment, the use of “fucking” in “when this fucking shit is over” conveys a strong emotional response to the narrative’s tension. The inclusion of “hahaha” immediately after this phrase introduces a humorous element, which lightens the severity of the language and aligns with Dynel's concept of mock impoliteness, where the surface impoliteness is not intended to be taken seriously.

2. Fuck (114 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 626)

Like "fucking," the term "fuck" was for its role as a swear word that can indicate strong negative emotions. It functions as a **negative expressive**, directly contributing to face-threatening acts through its blunt and offensive nature and is typically used in contexts of high emotional stakes, showing how fans might use strong language to express displeasure or extreme reactions to narrative development.

a. What the **fuck** Harvey ? ! You left her alone ?!

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

The exclamation "What the fuck Harvey?!" is a direct expression of anger and disapproval. This falls under bald on record impoliteness, where the speaker makes no attempt to mitigate the forcefulness of their message, directly challenging Harvey's actions. The use of "fuck" also intensifies the emotional impact and adds to the impoliteness by introducing vulgarity, which is inherently face-threatening.

The question "You left her alone?!" (Her, being Donna) functions as a challenging question, directly questioning Harvey's actions and judgment. According to Culpeper, such questions are a form of impoliteness as they imply criticism and disbelief, putting the respondent on the defensive. The use of exclamatory punctuation ("?!") and the intensifier "What the fuck" further emphasize the negative emotional tone, amplifying the impoliteness.

3. Crazy (94 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 694)

The term "crazy" is frequently used to describe situations or characters, often in a derogatory manner as **negative assertion**, where the speaker implies irrationality, thus attacking the positive face of the target by questioning their sanity. It reflects judgments about characters' actions or storylines, contributing to the discourse by emphasizing perceived irrationality or extreme behavior.

a. Ok. `</s><s>` Why would a person ever go live thousands of miles away from the love of her life at the moment he capitulates and surrenders to his love for her? `</s><s>` Is she

a vindictive bitch? Is she losing it herself starting a panic syndrome of her own? Wait! Is she really in love with Mike? Or with Rachel? Seriously. I am pissed! I will just get out of bed then and make myself some breakfast, and go eat on my balcony. After all, I am Brazil, it is a sunny day but not so hot, it is quarentine time, and I will make the best of it. Ok, I will keep on reading this **crazy** story when I rest from breakfast, lying in the hammock, hoping it is the part where Donna wakes up from some kind of nightmare.

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1

Mike Ross: A brilliant associate at Pearson Specter Litt, known for his photographic memory and complex friendship with Harvey.

Rachel Zane: A paralegal and later attorney at Pearson Specter Litt, who is romantically involved with Mike Ross.

Comment analyses:

The comment contains several challenging questions that imply criticism and disbelief, directly challenging the character's actions and decisions. Questions like "Why would a person ever go live thousands of miles away from the love of her life at the moment he capitulates and surrenders to his love for her?" and "Is she a vindictive bitch?" reflect strong negative judgment, aligning with Culpeper's framework of impoliteness.

These questions attack the character's mental state and reputation, further intensifying the impoliteness by undermining the character's integrity and relationships. The challenging question "Is she a vindictive bitch?" uses personalized derogatory language, which Culpeper categorizes as an impoliteness formula designed to offend. The phrase "Seriously. I am pissed!" conveys the commenter's strong emotional reaction using informal and emotive language, aligning with Culpeper's identification of negative expressive as a means of conveying impoliteness. The comment ends with a calm description of the commenter's actions ("I will just get out of bed then and make myself some breakfast..."), contrasting sharply with the earlier intense criticism.

This juxtaposition can be seen as mock politeness or sarcasm, highlighting the absurdity or frustration felt by the commenter. Despite the impoliteness, the commenter's willingness to "keep on reading this crazy story" after a break shows ongoing engagement and a form of loyalty to the narrative while strengthening social bonds within the community

members (BLITVICH, 2010). The use of the term “crazy” to describe the story emphasizes the commenter’s complex emotional engagement, indicating that even intense reactions and impoliteness can coexist with community bonding in fan discourse. This supports the idea that fans can express strong emotions and critiques while remaining invested and connected to the narrative.

4. Idiot(s) (78 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 786)

The term "idiot" is a common insult that indicates a negative evaluation of intelligence. This term's frequent use suggests that fans often resort to personal attacks to express dissatisfaction with characters or plot points, it is an example of **personalized negative assertion**, directly attacking the intelligence of the target, reflecting a direct form of impoliteness or as it is more common in the fandom, a form of **mock impoliteness**.

a. I hate paparazzi. </s><s> Those damn **idiots** . </s><s> Can they please let Donna and Harvey catch a breath for once? </s><s> DAMN them. </s><s> Thank you for another incredible chapter!

b. Loved, loved, loved all the emotions that exploded in that moment and swapped from the page right into me. </s><s> It's about damn time these two **idiots** stop being dumb.

Character’s background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character’s background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

The term “idiots” in comment A is directed at paparazzi, an external group unrelated to the immediate fan community. This expression is accompanied by strong negative language ("damn idiots," "DAMN them"), aligning with Culpeper’s framework of impoliteness as it aggressively criticizes the paparazzi. The expression of emotion is intense and negative, with words like “hate” and repeated emphasis on “DAMN.” At this point, it is also relevant to highlight that, in our data, swearing is closely linked to the creation of in-group solidarity and the enhancement of social connections, as noted by Dynel (2023). In addition to this gregarious feature, swear words are also employed to assert a sense of moral superiority over those targeted by the expletives (the characters).

From this perspective, the jocular tone of swearing not only signals informality and intimacy among group members but also captures their attention. As Oliveira and Miranda

(2024) have observed, swearing can be seen as a form of "mock impoliteness", which serves both moral and interpersonal functions. However, the term "idiots" in comment B is directed at Donna and Harvey, central characters within the fandom. Here, "idiots" is used in a context that blends affection with criticism, reflecting a more complex use of impoliteness where the term may serve as mock impoliteness or playful criticism rather than outright offense.

Both comments use the term "idiots," but the context and target differ significantly, influencing the perceived impoliteness. In Comment A, "idiots" is used as a direct and harsh criticism of an external group (paparazzi), aligning with negative impoliteness formulae that reinforce community bonding through shared opposition. In Comment B, "idiots" is directed at beloved characters in a context that mixes affection with criticism, aligning more with mock impoliteness that conveys frustration but also endearment, fostering deeper engagement and emotional connection with the narrative. Dynel's study on sarcasm and humor further illuminates the nuances of these interactions.

According to Dynel (2014), sarcasm involves saying the opposite of what one means, often to convey contempt or mockery, relying on contextual and social cues for its interpretation. In these comments, the use of "idiots" can be seen as a form of sarcasm or mock impoliteness. The playful criticism directed at characters reflects an understanding that the term is not meant to be taken seriously but rather as a humorous and affectionate critique, enhancing in-group solidarity and community bonding. This contrast highlights the varied use of impoliteness within fan discourse and its role in shaping community dynamics.

5. Mad (56 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1002)

"Mad" is often used to describe characters' mental states or actions in a negative light. Its use underscores how fans perceive and react to characters' behaviors. According to Culpeper, this term fits into **negative assertion**, undermining the target's positive face by questioning their rationality.

a. Oh, I got so **mad** when Faye did that to Donna. </s><s> This is son unrespectful that since that moment I knew I didn't care how the character evolve, I would never ever be on her side.

b. * LOUD SCREAMING NOISES Harvey is such a gentleman around her, so true. and HE LIED ABOUT THE BREAKUP, they broke up because of her. </s><s> HE CHOSE HER, and scottie didn't believe him because SHE WAS RIGHT and now donna's **mad** cause

he apparently can tell others how he feels about her, but not her. the miscommunication IM LIVING FOR IT, it's so them.

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Dana Scott (Scottie): a high-powered attorney and a former partner at Pearson Specter Litt.: She has a complicated romantic history with Harvey Specter, characterized by mutual respect and unresolved feelings.

Faye Richardson: a character introduced in later seasons of "Suits" as a special master appointed by the bar to oversee the operations of the law firm. Her role is often seen as antagonistic, as she imposes strict rules and challenges the firm's established dynamics, leading to conflicts with key characters like Donna Paulsen.

Comment analyses:

In Comment A, "mad" expresses a straightforward, negative emotional reaction to Faye's actions, aligning with Culpeper's negative politeness formulae. The comment's directness and strong language serve to align the commenter with others who share similar disapproval, strengthening community bonds through opposition. The commenter directs their anger towards a specific character's actions, highlighting the deep emotional investment in the story and characters.

In contrast, comment B uses "mad" as part of a complex emotional narrative, reflecting frustration with Donna and Harvey's miscommunication but within a broader context of enjoyment and engagement with the story. This use of "mad" aligns more with mock impoliteness, where criticism is affectionate and part of the fan's deep emotional involvement with the characters.

6. Weird (48 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1111)

The term "weird" is used to describe situations or characters that deviate from the fans' expectations. This term indicates discomfort or disapproval of unexpected narrative elements. Is it a **negative assertion that** subtly undermines someone, something or a situation by labeling them as abnormal.

a. Then we have them being happy for a few days and then donna saying harvey is treating her with such indifference even at home.. it is so **weird** i don't know what's going on

anymore haha oh an the end oh lord i am so ?!;&2929 confused

b. I really loved your writing, but the backward timeline here was a bit **weird** .

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

The term “weird” is used differently in each comment, reflecting varied levels of impoliteness and politeness formulas. In Comment A, “weird” expresses confusion and disorientation about the characters’ behavior, combined with humor to create a playful critique. This use aligns with mock politeness, softening the critique and engaging the community through shared emotional experiences and humor.

In Comment B, “weird” is used to provide constructive criticism of the author’s narrative technique, softened by initial praise. This use aligns with negative politeness formulae, where the critique is mitigated by positive feedback to maintain respect and constructive engagement within the community. By contrasting these uses, we see how the term “weird” can function differently based on context, tone, and target, reflecting the complex interplay of (im)politeness formulae in digital fan discourse.

7. Stupid (36 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1338)

"Stupid" is a direct insult targeting perceived lack of intelligence or poor decisions. It is a **personalized negative assertion**, attacking the positive face by denigrating the target's intellect, or as can be mostly observed in the corpus, a non-genuine form of impoliteness or an endearing term directed to the main characters.

a. And about this last chapter, God, they are so **stupid** that I cannot stop loving them.

b. This is ridiculous hahaha. </s><s> Last ch for me i cant go on this is **stupid**

c. I just wanted to constantly yell at them (mostly Harvey) to just TALK like grown up people because it would be so easy to just work it out. but instead it just gets worse and worse and despite Harvey being **stupid** and a dick, I also can feel very sorry for him. </s><s> Whatever he thinks is wrong with his shoulder, it must be really terrifying, because his whole career of course depends on it.

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

The use of "stupid" in an affectionate context, as in comment A, engages the community by highlighting shared feelings of frustration and love for the characters through the use of sarcasm and mock impoliteness. Despite the negative connotation, it highlights shared feelings of frustration and love for the characters, engaging the community by creating a bond among fans who can relate to loving flawed characters.

This usage aligns with Culpeper's (2011) concept of mock impoliteness, where the negative term is mitigated by the context of affection and shared emotional involvement. In comment B, direct and unmitigated criticism expresses a strong negative reaction that may resonate with fans who feel similarly but also risks alienating those who are still engaged with the story. The finality of the comment indicates a withdrawal from the community or at least from reading the fanfiction, highlighting the impact of direct impoliteness on community dynamics.

The balanced criticism and sympathy in comment C reflect a deep emotional engagement with the narrative and characters. This complex response can foster nuanced discussions within the community, as it acknowledges both the characters' flaws and their redeeming qualities. Spencer-Oatey (2008) explains that social connections in online spaces can be understood through different lenses, such as transactional objectives (focused on completing specific tasks) and relational objectives (aimed at fostering group unity). In this context, the term "stupid" helps fans navigate their emotional responses and negotiate their social identities within the fandom. The affectionate use of "stupid" aligns with relational goals by fostering a sense of solidarity, while direct criticism aligns with transactional goals by addressing perceived narrative flaws.

8. Cruel (32 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1459)

"Cruel" is used to describe characters' actions that are perceived as heartless or malicious. This term shows fans' moral judgments and it can be seen as a **negative assertion** targeting the moral character of the individual, thereby threatening their positive face.

a. BACK TO ENGLAND. </s><s> WAiT hold up, no. </s><s> AND she's getting married on her birthday. </s><s> ON HER 35th BIRTHDAY THAT IS JUST **CRUEL** BUT I LOVE IT and harvey as her man of honor, extra cruel gosh can i wrap him up in a blanket

already

- b. Omg this was **cruel** . </s><s> How could you end it there?! </s><s> I need more!
- c. God she can be **cruel** at times. </s><s> I get that he hurt her back then, but she hurt him too by leaving without notice, and she's still hurting him by acting immature now. </s><s> When is she going to act a little bit more like herself?

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

“Cruel” is used in comment A in a playful and affectionate manner, reflecting a fan’s enjoyment of dramatic narrative twists about Donna’s birthday and upcoming wedding. This comment reflects a blend of frustration and affection, aligning with Culpeper's (2011) concept of mock impoliteness where the negative term is mitigated by the context of affection and shared emotional involvement.

In contrast, B uses “cruel” to express direct frustration with a narrative decision, accompanied by a challenging question that critiques the author’s choice to end the chapter on a cliffhanger. Despite the strong negative emotion, the commenter's desire for more content indicates a continued investment in the story, engaging the community in discussions about narrative pacing and cliffhangers.

In Comment C, “cruel” is directed to Donna in a detailed and analytical critique of a character’s behavior when she also hurts Harvey, balanced by empathy and challenging questions. This reflects a deeper analysis of the character's actions and their impact on others, demonstrating the commenter’s engagement with character development and moral judgments within the narrative. This aligns with Goffman's (1967) concept of face and face-work, where the commenter navigates social identities and moral evaluations.

9. WTF (30 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1512)

"WTF" (What The Fuck) is an acronym expressing shock or disbelief. Its use indicates moments of high surprise or disapproval and would categorize this as **negative expressive** due to its strong emotional content, signaling impoliteness through its abrupt and informal nature.

- a. OMG STEPHEN CHEATED **WTF** (just when I think I couldn't hate him more

haha)

b. I'd like to see them interacting more with Harvey around. **WTF** THE ENDING OMG CLIFFHANGER!

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Stephen Huntley: a senior partner at Pearson Specter Litt's London office. He is introduced as Harvey Specter's old colleague but is later revealed to be manipulative and unethical, causing significant conflicts and betrayals within the firm.

Comment analyses:

Comment A employs "WTF" to express shock and disgust at Stephen's actions towards Donna, softened by humor. This use aligns with mock impoliteness, where the term serves to convey strong negative emotions while maintaining a playful tone that engages the community through shared disdain and humor. The addition of "haha" indicates that the comment, despite its harsh language, is meant to engage the community through shared disdain and humor, rather than to offend directly.

However, comment B uses "WTF" to express surprise and frustration at an unexpected plot twist and cliffhanger. The direct critique of the narrative choice is balanced by the commenter's ongoing interest in the story, fostering community discussions about the plot and character interactions. This usage reflects a more straightforward form of impoliteness, as it challenges the author's decision while also expressing a desire for continued engagement with the narrative.

The usage of "WTF" in these contexts highlights how fans navigate their emotional reactions and express impoliteness within the community. The term "WTF" serves to voice strong reactions and foster discussions that align with both these goals. It emphasizes a shared understanding and emotional response to the narrative.

10. Terrible (29 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1530)

"Terrible" is used to describe extremely negative evaluations of situations or characters. This term reflects fans' strong negative judgments and as a **negative assertion**, directly impacting the positive face by denigrating the quality of actions or decisions.

a. OMG, I don't even know where to start! **terrible** for Donna, about her

imagining him when with other guys.

b. I was pretty much cringing throughout this whole thing, waiting for something **terrible** to happen. </s><s> Glad it didn't & Harvey got his head out of his ass.

c. Gosh how I hate you Paula Agard fr! </s><s> You're a **terrible** therapist and juman I swear. </s><s> Anyways, can't wait to read Donna's POV: Harvey being an asshole, the panic attacks, not showing up during night...

Character's background:

Harvey, Donna and Paula: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

Comment A employs "terrible" to express empathy and emotional resonance with Donna's struggles. This use aligns with positive politeness formulae, fostering community solidarity through shared compassion and support for the character. The expression of feeling "terrible" indicates a deep emotional connection to the character's plight, encouraging empathy among other fans.

Differently, B uses "terrible" to describe anticipation and relief, reflecting the commenter's anxiety about the narrative's direction. The expression of relief mitigates the initial negative emotion, balancing criticism with positive engagement and encouraging discussions about the story's tension and resolution.

In comment C, "terrible" is used for direct criticism of Paula Agard, reflecting deep disdain and anger. This strong face-threatening act aligns with negative politeness formulae, engaging the community through shared disapproval and encouraging discussions about the character's negative impact. The eagerness for Donna's perspective indicates ongoing investment in the narrative.

Culpeper (2011) notes that impoliteness formulae like these negative assertions challenge the positive social value individuals claim for themselves. In these comments, "terrible" functions as a marker of impoliteness, conveying strong emotional reactions and judgments. The term serves to voice strong reactions, foster discussions, and engage the community in shared emotional experiences.

11. Sick (29 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1531)

"Sick" can be used both positively (slang for impressive) and negatively (disgusting, disturbing, or illness). The context-dependent use of "sick" shows varied emotional responses.

When used negatively, it aligns with Culpeper's **negative expressive** formula, signaling disgust or disapproval.

a. "He's serious about this woman, Donna." `</s><s>` my stomach twisted in the nastiest way ever i swear i felt **sick** ! `</s><s>` (if this person happens to be paula i am gonna kill someone) holy i don't know how to feel about this, it was a great chapter.

Character's background:

Harvey, Donna and Paula: refer to character's background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

The term "sick" here is used to convey a powerful physical reaction to emotional distress about "he" (Harvey) being with someone else, highlighting the commenter's deep investment in the narrative. This negative expressive term aligns with Culpeper's impoliteness formulae, emphasizing strong emotional turmoil and dissatisfaction with the plot development. The visceral reaction ("my stomach twisted in the nastiest way ever") indicates a profound emotional engagement with the storyline, which is a hallmark of intense fan interactions. Despite this, the commenter balances their intense reaction with positive acknowledgment of the chapter's quality, reflecting a nuanced engagement with the story.

12. Insane (28 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1564)

"Insane" is used to describe extreme behaviors or situations, often with a negative connotation. This term highlights fans' reactions to perceived irrationality. Culpeper would see this as a **negative assertion**, attacking the positive face by questioning the target's sanity.

a. Then we get to Mr Slimebag. `</s><s>` I mean.. eeewwwwwwwwwww, right? `</s><s>` You manage this perfect balance of ickiness and douchery cleverly disguised behind a facade of intellect, bravado and charm. `</s><s>` Should Donna see though his disguise? yeah, probably, but she's not in her right mind. `</s><s>` I mean she's not currently boning Harvey, ergo the woman is clearly clinically **insane** .

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Stephen (Mr. Slimebag): refer to character's background on term 9.

Comment analyses:

The term “insane” in this comment is used hyperbolically to critique Donna’s judgment and decisions in being with Stephe, here referred to as “Mr.Slimebag”, in a humorous manner. This usage aligns with Culpeper’s concept of mock impoliteness, where the exaggerated language serves to entertain rather than genuinely offend. The terms function as a negative expressive, dramatizing Donna’s perceived irrationality and engaging the community through shared humor, aligning with Dynel’s insights into how sarcasm and mock impoliteness can enhance social bonding and community engagement by balancing critique with humor.

The playful and hyperbolic use of “insane” encourages positive community interaction by fostering shared disapproval and humor. This usage aligns with Culpeper’s concept of mock impoliteness, where exaggerated language serves to entertain rather than genuinely offend. Goffman’s (1967) concept of face and face-work provides a basis for understanding how fans manage their social identities during interactions. When fans describe Donna as “insane,” they perform a face-threatening act that challenges her positive social value. This interaction highlights the social dynamics of negotiating identity and community norms within the fandom.

13. Shitty (26 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1651)

"Shitty" is a derogatory term used to describe poor quality or undesirable elements as it is a **negative expressive**, contributing to impoliteness through its derogatory nature. The use of this term underscores strong negative evaluations.

a. I'm a sucker for a Donna/Paula confrontation! </s><s> Everything Donna said was right! </s><s> Paula was a **shitty** girlfriend for not trusting Harvey and an even shittier therapist!

Character’s background:

Harvey, Donna and Paula: refer to character’s background on term 1

Comment analyses:

The term “shitty” in this comment is used to provide a strong negative evaluation of Paula’s roles as a girlfriend and therapist. This use of language aligns with Culpeper’s

framework of impoliteness, where “shitty” serves as a negative expressive, conveying intense disapproval and criticism. The direct and unmitigated use of “shitty” reflects bald on-record impoliteness, emphasizing the commenter’s strong negative feelings without softening the critique.

The repetition of the term amplifies the intensity of the disapproval, highlighting Paula’s perceived failings in both her personal and professional roles. By aligning with Donna’s perspective, the commenter engages the community through shared disapproval and validation of Donna’s actions. This alignment fosters a sense of solidarity among fans who support Donna and criticize Paula, promoting active engagement and discussion within the fan community.

14. Awful (26 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1661)

"Awful" is used to describe extremely negative perceptions of events or characters classified as a **negative assertion**, impacting the positive face by expressing strong disapproval.

a. I think Scottie would stick up for Harvey/Donna but Paula well she was just **awful** to them both. </s><s> I felt she was so manipulative with Harvey.

b. You always finish these at such intense spots! </s><s> Can't they just work it out! </s><s> Lol. </s><s> I can't believe harvey was so **awful** to Donna !

Character’s background:

Harvey, Donna and Paula: refer to character’s background on term 1.

Scottie: refer to character’s background on term 5.

Comment analyses:

The term “awful” is used in different ways in Comments A and B, reflecting different levels of impoliteness, emotional engagement, and community interaction. In Comment A, “awful” is employed to provide a broad critique of Paula’s behavior, emphasizing her manipulative actions towards Harvey and Donna.

Culpeper (2011) explains that such negative assertions are a form of impoliteness formulae that directly threatens the positive face of the characters involved. By calling Paula "awful," the commenter expresses a strong negative judgment about her actions, thereby inviting other community members to share in the disapproval. This fosters a collective stance

against the character, enhancing community bonds through shared sentiments.

In Comment B, “awful” is used to describe a specific instance of Harvey’s behavior towards Donna, reflecting disbelief and criticism. Goffman’s (1967) concept of face and face-work provides a framework for understanding how fans manage their social identities during interactions. The term “awful” acts as a face-threatening act that challenges the positive social value that characters claim for themselves. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that such face-threatening acts require politeness formulae to mitigate their impact and maintain social harmony, yet in these comments, the directness of “awful” highlights the emotional intensity and dissatisfaction of the fans.

15. Bitch (24 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1830)

“Bitch” is a gendered insult or even praise often directed at female characters. The frequent use of this term highlights gender dynamics and intense negative evaluations. In Culpeper's framework, it is a **personalized negative vocative**, attacking the target's positive face by using a derogatory label.

- a. and yes that **bitch** got kicked out like she deserved since the very beginning!
- b. Well, Paula is a **bitch** , that shocks no one.
 But she is a total phyco!
 Which is ironic to say the very least.
 Well, at least I didn't end up super tense.
- c. You **bitch**.
 Who gave you permission to make my heart ache?

Character’s background:

Harvey, Donna and Paula: refer to character’s background on term 1.

Comment analyses:

In Comment A, “bitch” is a pointed criticism towards Paula, employed to express strong disapproval and satisfaction with a character’s downfall, aligning with negative politeness formulae and fostering collective vindication among fans. In contrast,

Comment B, “bitch” and “phyco” are used to provide an intense and pointed criticism of Paula, emphasizing perceived hypocrisy and combining irony with mixed emotional reactions. This layered critique engages the community through detailed discussions and deeper engagement with character behavior and narrative impact.

Similar to comment A, in comment C, “bitch” is also used as a pointed criticism, but

it's directed at the author instead. It is employed in a playful and affectionate manner, reflecting mock impoliteness and deep emotional engagement with the narrative. This playful criticism fosters positive engagement through shared humor and emotional resonance.

16. Evil (22 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1853)

"Evil" is used to describe characters or actions perceived as morally reprehensible. This term indicates strong moral judgments, which is a **negative assertive**, targeting the moral character and thus threatening the positive face.

a. And everything seems to be going so perfect for them.. until.. until.. </s><s>
UNTIL YOU TURN **EVIL** AND BRING THOMAS FREAKING KESSLER INTO THE
PICTURE! </s><s> I've lost my shit the first time around. </s><s> I'm loosing my shit all
over again.

b. Noooooooooo! </s><s> What an **evil**, mean cliffie you ended with! </s><s> Call me
a junkie, but I want more of this story.

c. you're not evil.. no.. not at all.. you're vicious! you're so **evil** that evil people are just
nice when compared to you ! hahaha I'm kidding! </s><s> I love the angst ! I can't wait for
more!

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Thomas Kessler: a wealthy businessman and client of Zane Specter Litt Wheeler
Williams. He becomes romantically involved with Donna Paulsen, complicating her
relationship with Harvey Specter.

Comment analyses:

In Comment A, "evil" is directed at the author and used to express intense frustration
and disapproval of a plot twist, using hyperbolic language to dramatize the critique and
engage the community through shared emotional turmoil. However, in comment B, "evil" is
used to describe a cliffhanger ending, balancing playful criticism with admiration for the
narrative's suspense.

This usage aligns with mock impoliteness, engaging the community through a mix of
frustration and continued desire for more content, promoting positive engagement and
interactive discussions. And in comment C, "evil" is used affectionately and hyperbolically to

describe the author's actions, reflecting playful critique and deep emotional engagement with the story's dramatic elements. This playful hyperbole fosters a sense of humor and excitement among fans, promoting positive community interactions.

17. Pissed (21 occurrences, Wordlist ranking: 1893)

"Pissed" expresses anger or frustration. Its use shows the high level of emotional engagement. According to Culpeper, it is a **negative expressive**, signaling strong negative emotions and contributing to the face-threatening act.

a. For someone who always asked of him to be open, she never was herself much more open to him. </s><s> God I'm so **pissed** at Donna right now.. </s><s> And broken with Harvey. </s><s> I wonder if he will ever be able to trust anyone, including Donna.

b. Ok. </s><s> Why would a person ever go live thousands of miles away from the love of her life at the moment he capitulates and surrenders to his love for her? </s><s> Is she a vindictive bitch? </s><s> Is she losing it herself starting a panic syndrome of her own? </s><s> Wait! </s><s> Is she really in love with Mike? </s><s> Or with Rachel? </s><s> Seriously. </s><s> I am **pissed!** </s><s> I will just get out of bed then and make myself some breakfast, and go eat on my balcony. </s><s> After all, I am Brazil, it is a sunny day but not so hot, it is quarantine time, and I will make the best of it. </s><s> Ok, I will keep on reading this crazy story when I rest from breakfast, lying in the hammock, hoping it is the part where Donna wakes up from some kind of nightmare.

Character's background:

Harvey and Donna: refer to character's background on term 1.

Mike and Rachel: : refer to character's background on term 3.

Comment analyses:

The term "pissed" is used in distinct ways in Comments A and B. In the former, "pissed" is employed to express direct anger and disappointment towards Donna, focusing the critique on her perceived hypocrisy and lack of openness. This use of the term aligns with negative politeness formulae, fostering collective disapproval and empathy within the community. In Comment B, "pissed" is part of a broader emotional narrative that includes challenging questions and personal reflections.

The term conveys a mixture of anger, confusion, and frustration with Donna's actions,

highlighting the complexity of the commenter's emotional response. The use of challenging questions such as "Is she a vindictive bitch?" and "Is she losing it herself starting a panic syndrome of her own?" adds depth to the critique, inviting the community to consider various aspects of Donna's behavior. The personalization of the reaction, including descriptions of the commenter's surroundings and actions, adds a relatable and contextual layer to the emotional response.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of comments within the Darvey fandom on Fanfiction.net, following the conclusion of the "SUITS-USA" series, provides valuable insights into the patterns of (im)politeness in online fan communities. The data reveals how fans use language to express strong emotional reactions, disapproval, and criticism, contributing to community dynamics and engagement. Fans often use strong language to convey intense emotional reactions.

Terms like "fucking," "fuck," "crazy," "idiots," "mad," "weird," "stupid," "cruel," "WTF," "terrible," "sick," "insane," "shitty," "awful," and "bitch" are frequently employed to express disapproval, frustration, and criticism. These expressions indicate deep emotional investment in the characters and narratives rather than mere reflections of impoliteness.

As one can see, swearing was used in our data when the character was perceived as an antagonist or not acting as expected, also fulfilling the intrapersonal function of psychological relief (DYNEL, 2023, p. 113). As such, the phenomenon of swearing in the comments analyzed cannot be characterized as merely "aggressive". Although it involves the use of abusive language, primarily used to humiliate or demoralize the interlocutor or a third party, thus constituting a demonstration of linguistic impoliteness (CULPEPER, 2010; 2011; BOUSFIELD, 2008), it also performs a myriad of other functions, namely, interpersonal and cathartic.

As such, one can speculate that the use of swearing in fandom communities is associated with situations where the target of the aggression is perceived as immoral and thus deserves to be vilified. Besides the role of swearword to enact impoliteness, another formula that deserves attention in the data are the "challenging questions" (Culpeper, 2010). Since this verbal behavior does not represent a genuine demand for information, it represents a resource to vilify the character under attack while also reinforcing a type of moral superiority from the part of the fandom community.

A significant portion of the comments employs mock impoliteness, where negative

terms are used affectionately or humorously. For instance, calling characters "idiots" or "stupid" is often mitigated by an underlying tone of endearment, indicating a blend of frustration and love for the characters. This aligns with Culpeper's (2011) concept of mock impoliteness, where the intent is not to offend but to engage humorously with the narrative.

Context is crucial in understanding these terms. For example, calling a character "cruel" or "awful" often stems from specific narrative events that evoke strong emotional responses. The context-dependent nature of impoliteness highlights the importance of understanding the situational factors influencing fan reactions. Cultural and community norms also play a significant role in how these expressions are perceived and interpreted within the fandom. Expressions of disapproval and criticism, while negative, often serve to strengthen community bonds. Shared disapproval of certain characters or plot developments can foster a sense of solidarity among fans. This communal disapproval creates a platform for fans to connect over shared emotional experiences, enhancing community cohesion.

Fans use impoliteness to negotiate their social identities within the community. According to Goffman's (1967) concept of face and face-work, these expressions are face-threatening acts that challenge the positive social value of characters. However, within the fandom, these acts allow fans to assert their identities, opinions, and emotional investments, contributing to a dynamic and interactive community environment. Culpeper (2010, 2011) notes that the need to manage one's identity and self-presentation in virtual communities is similar to face-work in the offline world. The study categorizes various impoliteness formulae identified by Culpeper (2011), including direct insults, sarcasm, and mock politeness. These formulae are employed to assert power, express dissatisfaction, and negotiate social relationships.

The use of terms like "bitch", "psycho", and "insane" exemplifies direct impoliteness, while comments that mix criticism with humor reflect more nuanced impoliteness formulae. The use of strong language and impoliteness helps fans articulate their emotional responses and navigate their social identities within the fandom. By expressing strong disapproval or playful criticism, fans engage in relational goal-setting, fostering solidarity among those who share similar views.

The findings suggest that impoliteness in fanfiction comments is a significant component of community interaction, serving multiple functions. Strong emotional reactions and critical comments often lead to further discussion and engagement, keeping the community active and interactive. Shared disapproval and criticism can strengthen bonds among community members, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual support. Impoliteness

allows fans to navigate conflicts and express their dissatisfaction in a way that maintains community cohesion through shared understanding and humor.

The use of sarcasm reflects the intense reactions fans have towards narrative developments and character actions, serving both to express personal displeasure and to foster collective emotional experiences. The incorporation of sarcasm and humor in such expressions further enhances the dynamics of online fan interactions, illustrating the nuanced ways in which fans communicate and bond over shared interests and sentiments.

The analysis of (im)politeness in the Darvey fandom highlights the complex interplay between language, emotion, and social dynamics in online communities. By expressing disapproval and criticism, fans convey their emotional investment in the narrative and contribute to the vibrant and dynamic nature of the fandom. Understanding these patterns provides valuable insights into digital communication practices and the role of impoliteness in fostering community engagement and cohesion.

By examining the comments through the lenses of various scholars, including Culpeper, Goffman, Brown and Levinson, and Dynel, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of (im)politeness in fan interactions. These insights are crucial for understanding how fan communities function and maintain cohesion in the digital age.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study focused on analyzing impoliteness in comments within a fanfiction community, emphasizing emotional reactions, engagement with characters, and the interplay of impoliteness and politeness. We start from the idea that verbal attacks, insults, and swearwords may be seen as a characteristic of fandom communities when they evaluate narratives and characters perceived as villainous, oppressive, or unjust. The hypothesis suggested that expressions of disapproval and criticism in fanfiction comments would enhance connection and engagement among community members.

The research aimed to answer several key questions: what expressions of disapproval or criticism are found on Fanfiction.net? How do these comments enact impoliteness? How does this impoliteness influence membership and participation in the fanfiction community? To address these questions, expressions of disapproval and criticism were examined, revealing a range of emotional reactions and character evaluations. These expressions often highlighted intense emotional responses and negative evaluations of narrative elements and character portrayals.

In our data, impoliteness was enacted through exaggerated emotional language, negative evaluations, and intense reactions to story elements, reflecting both emotional engagement and acknowledgment of the writer's skill. Building on these observations, the study discussed how impoliteness influences community membership and participation. Comments containing impoliteness often indicate a deeper emotional investment in narratives and characters, contributing to community engagement. Key findings included a mix of impoliteness and politeness, reflecting intense emotional responses towards narrative elements, and the prevalence of emotional engagement and negative evaluations in the fanfiction community.

The use of derogatory language and confrontational tone in these comments further underscores the speaker's emotional investment in the fictional world, where deviations from expected outcomes provoke strong reactions (HILLS, 2002). Analyzing comments within the context of fan culture provides insight into the motivations behind expressed impoliteness and highlights the complex relationship between fans, fictional narratives, and emotional investment (JENKINS, 2012). Impoliteness serves both intrapersonal processes, such as venting emotions and opinions, and interpersonal ones, such as generating affiliation and reaffirming community feelings (DYNEL, 2023). High levels of emotional investment indicate that readers are deeply connected to the narrative and characters, setting the stage for understanding how impoliteness is enacted within the community.

Moreover, impoliteness often spurs further discussion and debate, enhancing community interaction and engagement. Thus, impoliteness plays a significant role in fostering a dynamic and interactive community environment. The study reinforces that users expect a hybrid and fluid environment when communicating in digital spaces (OLIVEIRA, CARNEIRO, 2020; OLIVEIRA, MIRANDA, 2022). Understanding impoliteness in fanfiction communities provides valuable insights into digital communication practices and highlights the importance of language in constructing social realities.

By examining the ways in which fans express approval, disapproval, and negotiate their social identities, this research provides insights into the broader implications of (im)politeness in online fan communities. It enriches our comprehension of digital discourse and its impact on social interaction, offering valuable perspectives on how fan communities function and maintain cohesion in the digital age.

Understanding the role of impoliteness in fan interactions can help community moderators and leaders create effective guidelines for maintaining a healthy and inclusive environment. Recognizing that expressions of disapproval and criticism are often tied to deep

emotional investment can lead to better conflict management and positive engagement. Balancing impoliteness with constructive feedback can help fanfiction writers improve their craft and feel supported, enhancing the quality of interactions within the fandom.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for further research into the long-term effects of impoliteness on community dynamics. Understanding how persistent negative interactions affect member retention, participation, and overall community health is crucial for developing sustainable online fan communities that foster creativity, engagement, and mutual support.

Given these insights, the study recommends further research on the long-term effects of impoliteness on community dynamics and reader-author relationships. Balancing impoliteness with constructive feedback could enhance community engagement. Understanding impoliteness's impact on community interactions is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive digital environment.

In conclusion, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of digital communication practices, emphasizing (im)politeness' role in shaping online interactions. It offers perspectives on how fan communities function and maintain cohesion in the digital age, highlighting the complex dynamics of social interactions in digital environments. By shedding light on these dynamics, the study attempted to offer a comprehensive view of the relationship between language, emotion, and community engagement in digital space.

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